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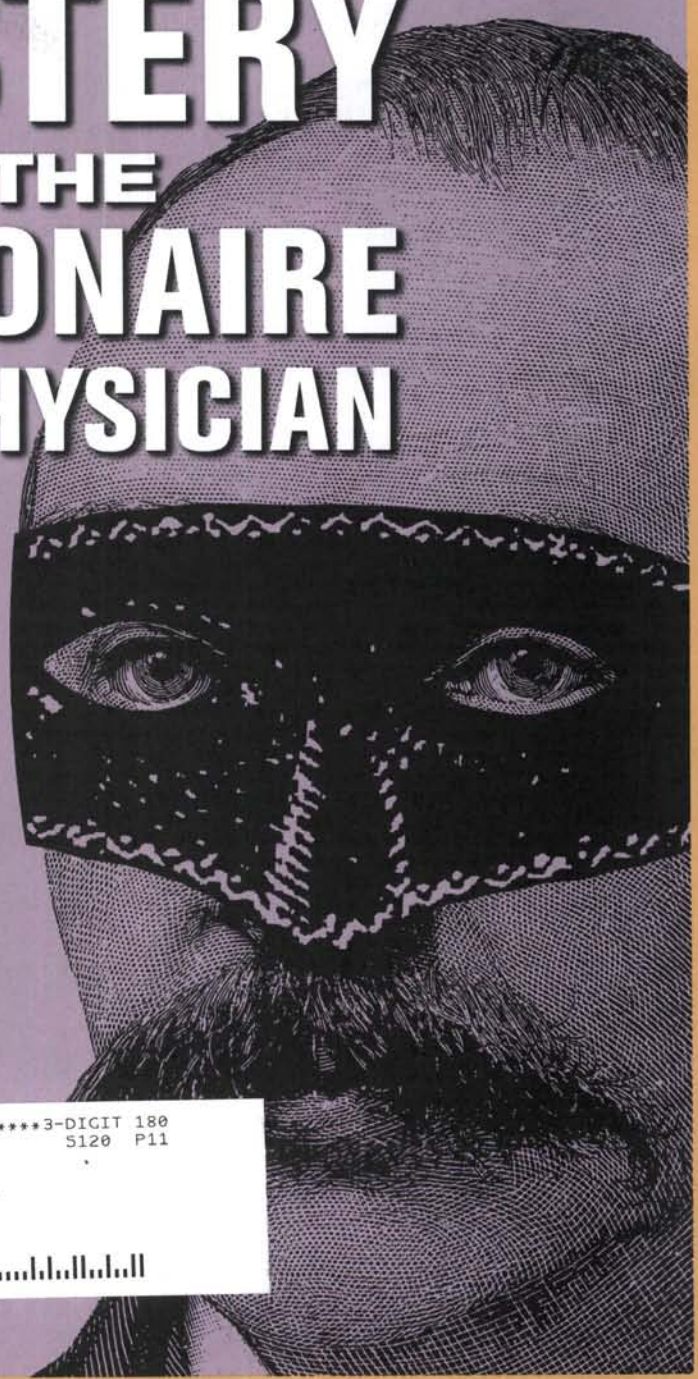

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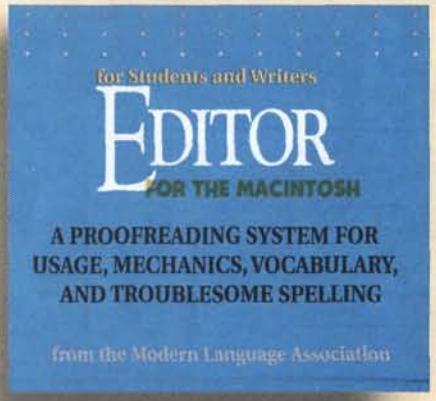
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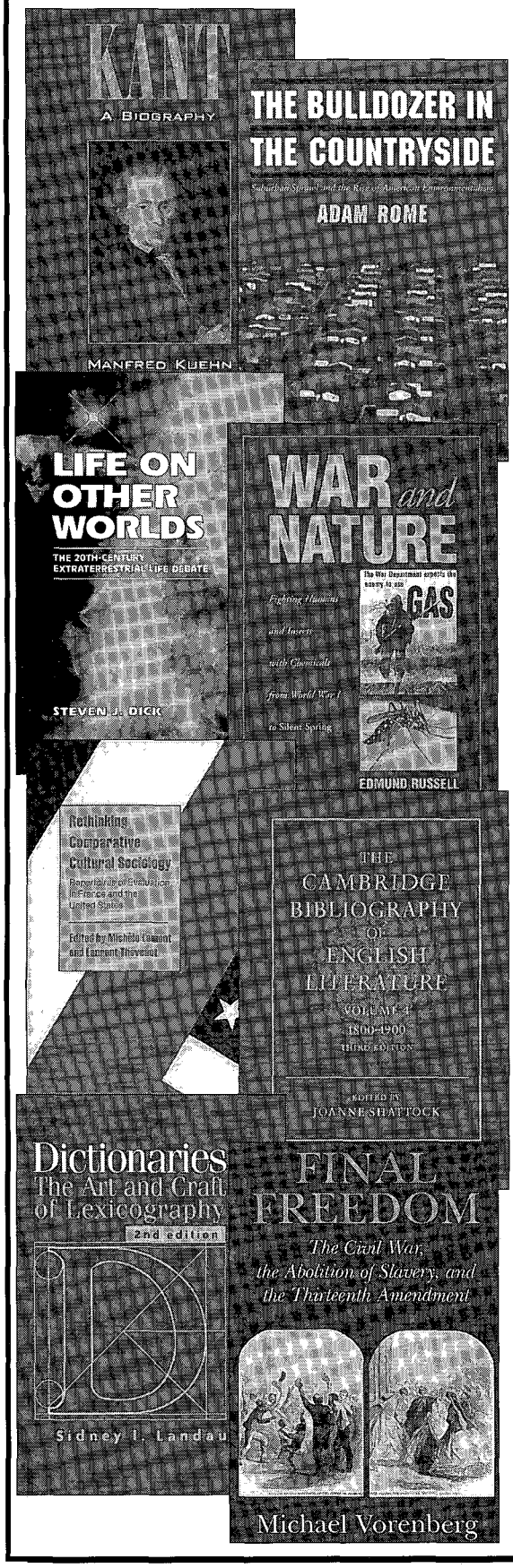

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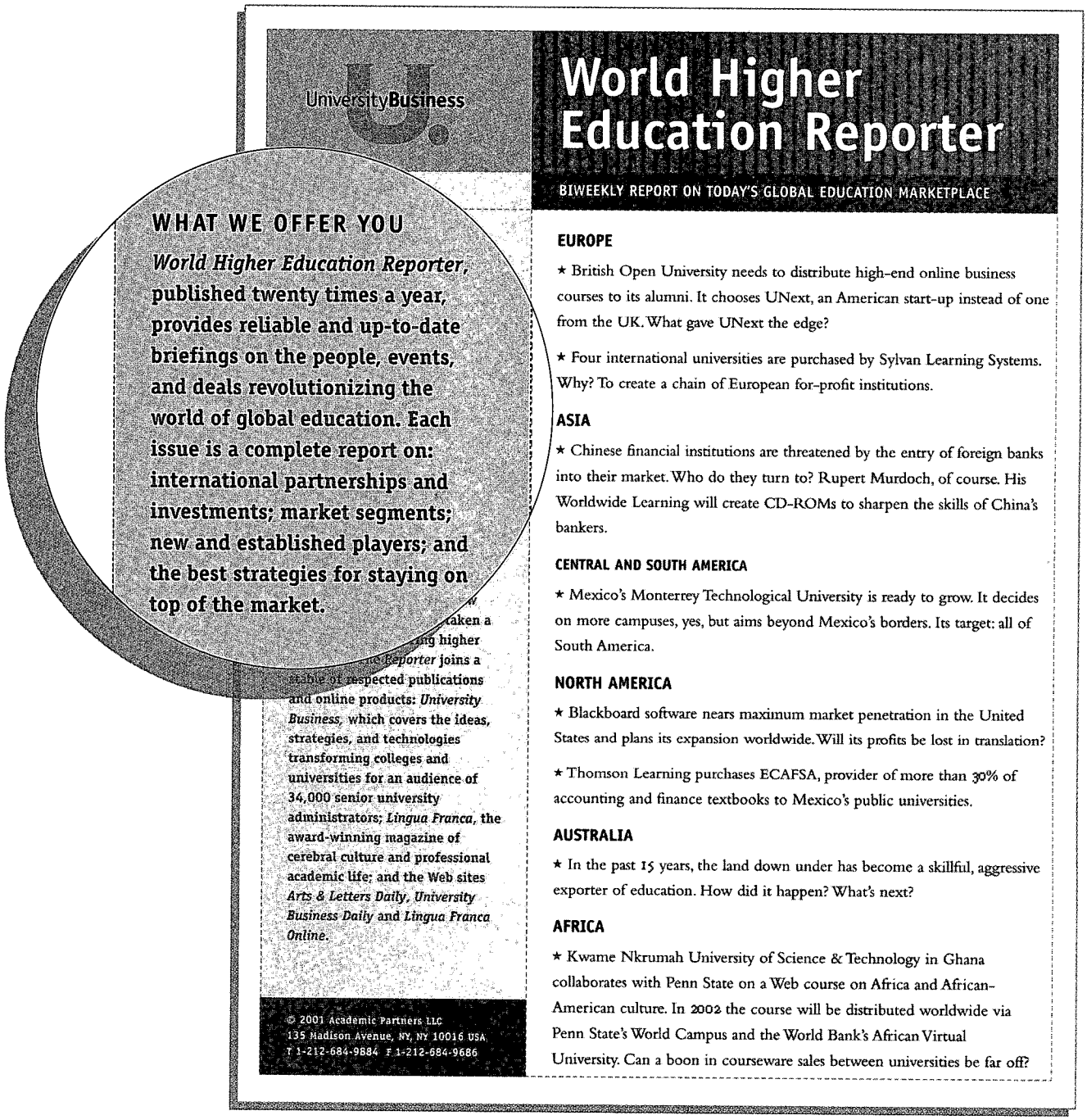
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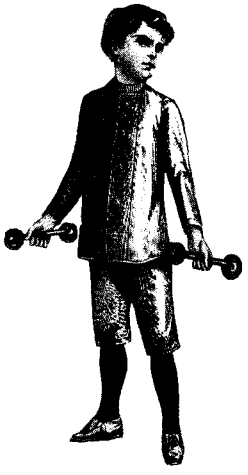

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"One day he overheard, in a coffee-house, some Greeks and Jews conversing, in lingua Franca, on a terrible adventure that had just happened in the seraglio: a beautiful European slave, that had been lately brought thither, had made great resistance to the desires of the grand seignor."

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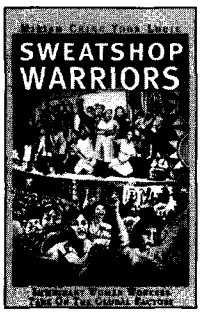
Sweatshop Warriors

Immigrant Women Workers Take On the Global Factory

By Miriam Ching Yoon Louie



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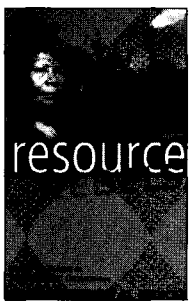
Sweatshop Warriors highlights the pioneers of the growing movement against sweatshops: immigrant women workers. In an intimate look at these extraordinary women worker-activists, Miriam Ching Yoon Louie records their personal reflections on gender and class conflicts within their unions and communities. She then documents their winning strategies against Levi-Strauss, Donna Karan, and others.

Resource Rebels

Native Challenges to Mining and Oil Corporations

By Al Gedicks



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Native peoples are facing extinction globally due to the greed of mining and oil companies. As the energy crisis intensifies, their plight sounds the alarm to all those concerned about global warming, genocide, and preventable eco-disasters. *Resource Rebels* traces the development of multiracial transnational movements that are countering resource extraction and creating a new environmental ethic.

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Jacques Derrida *and* **Maurizio Ferraris**

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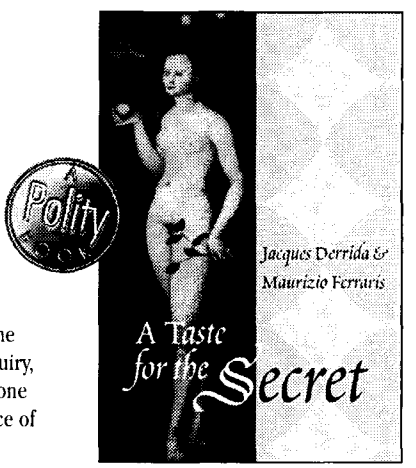

In this series of dialogues, Derrida discusses and elaborates on some of the central themes of his work, such as the problems of genesis, justice, authorship and death. Combining autobiographical reflection with philosophical enquiry, Derrida illuminates the ideas that have characterized his thought from its beginning to the present day. If there is one feature that links these contributions, it is the theme of singularity – the uniqueness of the individual, the resistance of existence to philosophy, the temporality of the singular and exceptional moment, and the problem of exemplarity.

The second half of this book contains an essay by Maurizio Ferraris, in which he explores the questions of indication, time, and the inscription of the transcendental in the empirical. A work of outstanding philosophy and scholarship, the essay is developed in close proximity to Derrida and in dialogue with figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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WHAT THE HEALER KNOWS

As a traditional healer (*nganga*) among Zimbabwe's Shona and Ndebele people and a registered nurse who works at UCLA Medical Center, I spend much of my life moving between two very different medical modalities. Why, then, did I find myself irritated by Matthew Steinglass's article ["It Takes a Village Healer," April] about how Westerners are allying themselves with traditional practitioners in facing the AIDS crisis?

Africans have had their traditional cultures trivialized, and sometimes demonized, by Christianity and Islam, and the continent's political and economic institutions have been buried under foreign forms. Western medicine often condescends to the intelligence and vitality of African ways of knowing, and many people quoted in Steinglass's piece display their variations on this tired theme. Has it occurred to no one to communicate between epistemologies? Why is it only Africans who are required to alter limited or dangerous ways of perceiving?

Western allopathy is an ethnomedical tradition with its own virtues, lacunae, and superstitions, not to mention its own indigenous forms of brutality. When I return from Africa and have to shift into the logic of a modern hospital, I am struck first by the institutionalized superficiality of its medical practices. Though impressive in emergencies and diagnostics and sometimes in pharmaceutical intervention, Western medicine tends toward both the heroic and the bureaucratic and thus lacks a coherent relationship to incurability and the simple fact of mortality. African medicine also has its lacunae and superstitions and brutalities, as Steinglass shows. But the vibrancy of African medical understanding is at its root community-based: Every true healing is nested in the community of the living and the ancestors. Questions of meaning, so critical to anyone with a life-threatening illness, are at the core of African healing. In the West, these questions are not, fundamentally, a medical concern. When it comes to treating psychological distress and madness, there is no doubt in my mind that African medicine is more sophisticated and effective.

Between the West and Africa, there is rich ground for collaboration regarding AIDS. But until the West can meet the traditional healer as a peer, the gifts of biomedicine will be received with the ambivalence one might feel upon receiving a gift from a missionary.

MICHAEL ORTIZ HILL
Eranos Institute
Ascona, Switzerland

SOUND JUDGMENTS

Paul Mitchinson's survey of architectural acoustics and acousticians ["Bouncing Off the Walls," April] characterizes well the complicated physical phenomenon of a concert hall filled with sound. He has accurately identified the different approaches taken by consultants today and has richly portrayed the debate over the merits of scientific approaches versus more intuitive ones.

Missing from his report, however, is a sense of the equally complex process whereby a culture decides what constitutes "good sound." Just as the distinction between noise and music has shifted and changed over time, our criteria for success in architectural acoustics have shifted. Both Symphony Hall and Carnegie Hall were once vehemently criticized for the sounds that we so admire today. The now despised fan-shaped auditoriums built in the 1920s and 1930s offer a sound that is simply no longer in fashion, even though it was highly valued in its own time.

EMILY THOMPSON
Assistant Professor of History and Sociology of Science
University of Pennsylvania

STRIKE BACK

It would appear from Chris Mooney's article ["Status Anxiety in San Juan," April] that the students who disrupted Professor Aurea María Sotomayor's classroom during a strike were intolerant nationalists angry that she had dared to confront nationalist values that pervade Puerto Rican university culture. The decision of a university professor to hold an exam during a student strike, however, is a challenge to an interna-

continued on page 60

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PIG PERPLEX

MAUS, ART SPIEGELMAN'S Pulitzer Prize–winning comic-book memoir of the Holocaust, has proved a literary sensation in country after country since the first volume was published fifteen years ago. (There have been more than twenty translations.) Until recently, however, one country had been persistently and conspicuously unwilling to embrace the book: Poland, the homeland of Spiegelman's parents and the setting for much of the book's action.

For years, efforts to publish a Polish edition were stymied by the visceral reaction of Polish editors and commentators to what they took as the central scandal of Spiegelman's entire project. Depicting Jews as mice and Nazis as cats was entirely unobjectionable, they felt, but Poles portrayed as *pigs*? Impossible! One publisher after another hesitated at the quite real prospect of reader boycotts and protests. Finally, this year, a small Kraków outfit has released a Polish edition of the book. At the behest of Adam Michnik's *Gazeta Wyborcza,* the country's most widely circulated newspaper, I undertook the interview with Spiegelman that follows.

"There were a few countries whose translations really mattered to me," Spiegelman explained in his SoHo studio, taking a drag on his ever present cigarette. "France, for example, in part because my wife is French and in part because of the long and highly sophisticated tradition of literary comic books over there. And Germany, of course, where the book proved a considerable best-seller and even gets assigned in classes.

"But a Polish publication of the book has all along been particularly important to me because—how should I say this?—well, the kind of ambivalence the Poles feel toward certain aspects of their past is mutual with me and goes back to my earliest memories. As I was being raised in Rego Park, my parents regularly expressed negative feelings about the Poles; but those feelings were regularly being expressed *in Polish,* so that Polish is really my mother tongue and the comforting lullaby music of my infant life."

But, I asked, what about the issue of having portrayed Poles as pigs? Countless Polish publishers have told me that if the Poles in *Maus* hadn't been portrayed as pigs, there'd never have been the slightest problem about publishing the book.

"To begin with," Spiegelman said, stiffening slightly, "let's be honest about this: On this particular subject, if there weren't any problem, *that* would be a problem. Look," he continued, taking another long drag on his cigarette. "For the hundredth time..." He paused, redeploying his thoughts. "I'll tell you a story. Shortly after the first volume of *Maus* was published here in the United States, I felt the need to visit Poland—Sosnowiec, Auschwitz, and so forth—for research purposes, to help me visualize the places my father was going to be talking about in the next volume

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of the book. When he said that he and my mother were stumbling through the streets of Sosnowiec late at night, frantic for shelter.... In my mind a street at night is West Broadway in my SoHo neighborhood, and I needed to see what streets in Sosnowiec actually looked like.

"So I applied for a visa—this would have been in 1987—and I got a call from the Polish embassy in Washington, asking me to drop by the New York consulate; they were going to be sending someone up from Washington to interview me. The day came, I went up to talk with the guy—entirely cordial. He indicated that they would be granting the visa, but he, too, wanted to know, very concerned: Why Poles as pigs?

Fifteen years after its U.S. publication, Art Spiegelman's comic book *Maus* has finally found a Polish publisher.

"My initial reply, I suppose, was a bit facetious: 'At first,' I told him, 'I tried to render Poles as noble stags, but I eventually found it just too hard inking in all those antlers.' But then I went on, trying to explain how in the American cartoon tradition, pigs simply don't carry any particular negative connotation: Porky Pig, for instance, is every bit as cuddly and beloved a figure as Mickey Mouse. Although it wasn't lost on me that as far as my mother and father were concerned, the main thing about pigs is that they weren't kosher. Beyond that, in terms of the narrative conventions of the text, the main thing to be noted about pigs is that they are not part of the book's overriding metaphorical food chain. Pigs don't eat mice—cats do. Pigs are relatively innocuous as far as mice are concerned.

"The embassy guy nodded politely, but clearly he wasn't buying my explanations. 'Mr. Spiegelman,' he said gravely, at length, 'the thing you don't seem to understand is that in Poland calling someone a swine is a much, much greater insult than seems to be the case here in America. Swine, you see, is what the Nazis called the Poles.'

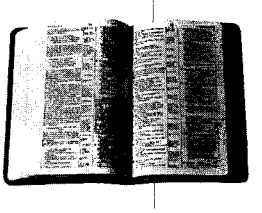
"'Exactly!' I replied. 'And they called *us* vermin. That's the whole point.' You see, I didn't make up these metaphors, the Nazis did. I was just trying to explore them, to take them seriously, to unravel and deconstruct them. I must say, I keep waiting for some Pole to take umbrage at the fact that I portray Jews as rodents—I mean, I'm not holding my breath or anything, though it would be nice.

"But actually, it's interesting when you look at those metaphors in the context of the sort of suffering competition that so seems to define Jewish-Polish relations nowadays. Because if you think about the Thousand-Year Reich as a sort of animal farm, to borrow a metaphor, Jews as rodents or vermin were pests to be destroyed and exterminated first thing, indiscriminately, as a matter of course. Whereas Poles as pigs, like all the Slavic races in the entire Nazi conception, while not to be coddled, weren't to be indiscriminately destroyed: They were to be put to use and worked for their meat. Neither status was enviable, but it's a distinction worth noting nevertheless.

"Beyond that, though," Spiegelman went on, "the main thing to ask is that people try to see past those initial metaphors. In terms of the narrative itself, in terms of what actually happened to my mother and father, it's all very complicated: There were pigs who behaved well and pigs who behaved shabbily, just as there were mice who did likewise. I mean, look"—he reached for a volume of the American edition, leafing through for a particular page (page 136, as it

STEAL THIS BIBLE!

THIS MAY, NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO'S *ON THE MEDIA* DETAILED the shoplifting habits of bookstore browsers in New York City. During the segment, writer Ron Rosenbaum recalled learning from a clerk at his local Barnes & Noble that the store's most frequently pilfered authors were Martin Amis, Paul Auster, Georges Bataille, Charles Bukowski, William S. Burroughs, Italo Calvino, Raymond Chandler, Michel Foucault, Dashiell Hammett, Jack Kerouac, and Jeanette Winterson.



Okay, so Bukowski and Burroughs aren't surprising. But Bataille and Foucault? Are graduate students really *that* hard up? Or is this some sort of structuralist slight of the author—and his entitlement to compensation—taken to extremes? Curious about book theft in other bibliophile communities, we made some calls.

Mark Mouser of the University Book Store in Seattle reports that the Beats are hot—so hot that "we pulled them out of the fiction and poetry sections and created a special Beat section next to the information desk, where we could keep an eye on them." At Book People in Austin, titles by Noam Chomsky, J.D. Salinger, and Philip K. Dick are on the "five-finger-discount list." The store's Brandy Whitten-Klaw says high-end psychology books, including textbooks and the DSM-IV, are also targets.

Karen Pennington at Kepler's Books and Magazines, near Stanford, tells us that the store's religion section is hard hit. "Last year we had a run on Buddhism books," she notes. Next in popularity? The Bible. "The karmic wheel must not turn fast enough," Pennington muses. "But if Buddha doesn't punish you, you might at least worry that Yahweh will."

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happened, in the final chapter of part 1)—"on this single page, for instance, you've got the entire range of responses: My mother and father are desperately roaming the streets of Sosnowiec, seeking shelter, wearing pig masks, and first they knock on the door of the pig-woman who used to work for them as my brother's nanny, and she slams the door in their face; then they make their way to the home of the pig-man who used to work as the janitor in my mother's father's house, and he offers them shelter in his stable, at great personal risk. Both have pig faces, and yet one behaves with great generosity, while the other, if one wants to be generous about it, behaves out of sheer self-interest. And that's what things were really like."

Pausing, he took another deep drag on his cigarette. "That literal-minded way of thinking can get ridiculous. If *Maus* is about anything," he concluded, "it's a critique of the limitations—the sometimes *fatal* limitations—of the caricaturizing impulse. I did my damnedest *not* to caricature anybody in this book—and anyone who caricatures my efforts in any other light, I'm sorry, that's *their* problem, not mine."

LAWRENCE WESCHLER

FAIR HARVARD?

PROTESTERS HANG OUT A WINDOW TO SALUTE FELLOW STUDENTS RALLYING IN HARVARD YARD.

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

For twenty-one days, students occupied Massachusetts Hall to protest Harvard's treatment of low-wage workers.

THIS JULY, HARVARD UNIversity will witness an orderly and predictable transfer of power. President Neil Rudenstine, humanist and fund-raiser extraordinaire, will step down, passing on his office to Lawrence Summers, economist and statesman of substance. But Harvard's carefully managed succession has been nearly overshadowed by events neither orderly nor predictable.

On April 18, fifty members of Harvard's Progressive Student Labor Movement (PSLM) occupied Massachusetts Hall, the administrative building housing the offices of Rudenstine and other administrators, to demand that university employees be paid a "living wage" of $10.25 per hour.

From the beginning, there were signs that this was an unusually organized action. The protesters brought laptops and cell phones. They had an extensive Web site detailing their two-and-a-half-year campaign for a living wage at Harvard. They had consulted lawyers, prepared press packets, and collected a long list of endorsements.

And indeed the protesters attracted much support: Ted Kennedy, Robert Reich, and John Sweeney showed up and made impassioned speeches on their behalf. At mealtimes, campus workers passed food through the windows. Sympathetic students set up a tent city outside in Harvard Yard.

As the sit-in wore on, the debate over wages intensified. The administration insisted that it paid prevailing industry rates, that the students' tactics were coercive, and that the university had already addressed their concerns by promising job-skills and literacy training to low-wage workers. The PSLM countered that literacy classes were of little immediate help to the one thousand to two thousand janitors, food service workers, and security guards making less than $10.25 per hour. Many of these workers, they said, hold down two full-time jobs. The protesters also claimed that recent outsourcing of jobs to subcontractors had sharply decreased wages while weakening the workers' unions. As for their extreme tactics, the protesters insisted they had exhausted all other means.

As the administration held firm, faculty members displayed considerable support for the sit-in. On Day 5 of the occupation, Juliet Schor, acting chair of women's studies, and Marshall Ganz, lecturer at the Kennedy School, convened various colleagues, and the Faculty Committee for a Living Wage was born. Feelings ran high among those present. "At the beginning of the sit-in," said Timothy Patrick McCarthy of the history and literature department, "President Rudenstine canceled the [scheduled] faculty meeting, saying that there was essentially no university business—in the midst of this sit-in in a university hall! That really pissed off a lot of people on the faculty."

Within forty-eight hours, the committee had drafted a letter urging Rudenstine to reconsider the living wage. "We believe that if Harvard employees are not adequately compensated," the letter stated, "then the Harvard community as a whole should assume responsibility for correcting the situation." More than four hundred faculty members subsequently signed on, including many of Harvard's biggest names—among them Laurence Tribe, Lani Guinier, Christopher Jencks, and Cornel West. Whole departments discussed the issue, and the social anthropology program passed a unanimous resolution supporting the campaign.

Still, though faculty support was broad, it was not universal. Government professor Harvey Mansfield, who calls himself "one of the few conservatives

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at Harvard," told *Lingua Franca* that the students set a dangerous precedent. Law professor Charles Fried added that though it is "appropriate that Harvard pay decent salaries," he found the protest "pure self-aggrandizing grandstanding." He also noted that the "students sitting in [were] not union members.... The university would actually be committing an unfair labor practice if it changed the wages of...the bargaining unit without bargaining with the union first."

Meanwhile, the living wage is fast becoming a hot issue at other schools—there are now living-wage campaigns on some fifteen campuses. This may indicate an overall shift in student activism. If the 1980s were marked by student efforts to compel divestment of holdings in South Africa and the 1990s saw student struggles over issues of race and gender on campus—including affirmative action and ethnic and women's studies curricula—then recent activism reflects a newfound emphasis on labor issues. The last few years have seen campaigns to end sweatshop labor, protests over the effects of free trade and globalization on workers, the birth of the AFL-CIO's popular Union Summer student activist training program, graduate student unionization drives, and now the living-wage battle.

This spring, students at Princeton, Brown, and Cornell demonstrated to improve worker compensation. If these schools seem an elite bunch, it may be no accident: The Harvard protesters frequently point to their school's vast $19 billion endowment—the largest of any university—and note that it has grown by $6 billion since their campaign began. They further maintain that a living wage would cost less than one half of 1 percent of the interest earned by the endowment annually.

The notion of sharing profits with workers cannot be foreign to former Treasury secretary Summers, who is credited with pioneering work on labor markets and wage structures. Although Summers kept silent about the sit-in, protesters nonetheless waved cartoons portraying him as a latter-day Marie-Antoinette offering up cake to the needy (WORKERS CAN'T EAT PRESTIGE read another popular sign).

In the end, the president and the protesters reached a compromise of sorts. On May 8—Day 21 of the sit-in—the twenty-five remaining students left Massachusetts Hall. Rudenstine proclaimed their departure "a welcome development"; the protesters declared victory.

Although Harvard did not commit to a living wage, it did establish a new committee to consider the welfare of its low-wage employees. This committee, chaired by economics professor Lawrence Katz and composed of eleven faculty members, three workers, four students, and two administrators, is charged with considering "the principled basis, desirability, and feasibility" of a living wage.

Additionally, the university announced a freeze on outsourcing and agreed to negotiate a new contract ahead of schedule with the janitors' union.

But was this the end or the beginning? The afternoon the sit-in at Harvard ended, another began at the University of Connecticut. The students' demands? Increased wages for janitors and a halt to outsourcing.

KATE JULIAN

LIBRARY 54

THE COMMON STEREOTYPE OF LIBRARIANS—THAT THEY ARE shy and prefer the company of books to that of people—may or may not be valid. But it's easy to understand why librarians in Seattle were unhappy with some of the ideas Rem Koolhaas initially proposed in his design for the city's new high-tech public library, which will begin construction this summer. In discussions with the library board, the avant-garde Dutch architect proposed a number of off-the-wall ideas, including "discotheque-style foot lights that would have lit up wherever librarians walked, making them easy to spot," according to *The Wall Street Journal*. One member of the board told the *Journal*: "Librarians were like, 'I am sorry, but I do not want a little light following me around as I try to help people.'" Koolhaas quickly dropped the idea.

HEAVY VETTING

"WE ARE AN OPEN, INCLUSIVE university whose foundation is intellectual and academic freedom." This is the central credo of Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, according to its Web site. But a bitter battle between the school's administration and its humanities department has left critics worried that the words are little more than window dressing. David Noble, whose appointment to the humanities department's J.S. Woodsworth Chair was rejected by the administration, is considering filing discrimination and conspiracy charges against Simon Fraser. The university, for its part, has assigned an independent reviewer to assess the facts.

The saga started last October when Stephen Duguid, head of the humanities department at Simon Fraser, informed Noble, a professor of history at York University in Toronto, that he'd been selected as one of three finalists for an endowed chair named for James Shaver Woodsworth, a preeminent Canadian labor activist and social reformer in the early twentieth century. A Methodist minister who broke with the church over its support of World War I, Woodsworth was arrested for his involvement in the Winnipeg general strike of 1919. He also served as a Labour M.P. for more than twenty years, and in 1932 he founded a social democratic party that was the forerunner of today's New Democratic Party. The duties of Simon Fraser's Woodsworth chair, says Duguid, include teaching, publishing scholarship on social issues, and engaging in activism in the spirit of J.S. Woodsworth.

By the end of January, Noble learned that he had the unanimous backing of the search committee and the strong approval of the humanities department. Duguid forwarded the appointment to the dean, John Pierce, for approval. It seemed a good fit. Duguid says the department was impressed by Noble's record of political activism and by his unorthodox scholarship on technology

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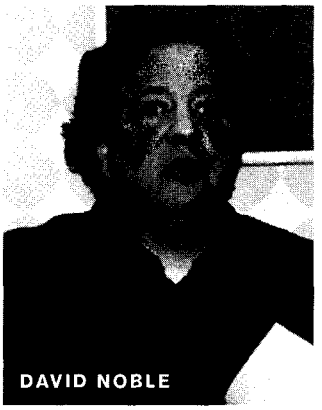

DAVID NOBLE

COURTESY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS, YORK UNIVERSITY, TORONTO, CANADA

Simon Fraser University hired a private consulting firm to investigate David Noble's qualifications for an endowed humanities chair.

and culture. In his book *The Religion of Technology*, Noble contends that the scientific elite is the secular equivalent of a medieval priesthood—it mystifies knowledge and disguises the social bases of its power in order to aggrandize itself and suppress democratic decision making. Noble is also the author of the widely discussed essay "Digital Diploma Mills"; in it, he warns that computer-based education serves mostly to enable university administrators to disempower faculty.

For his part, Noble was excited about working in a humanities department—at York, he is in the social sciences—and teaching smaller classes. He was also pleased by the idea of occupying a chair funded in large part by donations from hundreds of union locals and individual laborers and farmers throughout Canada.

But the people's chair quickly turned into a hot seat. In March, a stunned Duguid informed Noble that both Pierce and John Waterhouse, Simon Fraser's vice president of academics, had refused to approve his appointment. The reason? The administration had asked the Vancouver-based consulting firm Provence to look into Noble's qualifications for the job, and Noble had refused to cooperate with the firm. In return, the administration rejected his candidacy.

Why did the university turn to Provence? According to David Mitchell, vice president of external relations at Simon Fraser, using an outside consultant is the university's standard operating procedure for searches involving endowed chairs. "We would look at it in almost the same context as the hiring of a dean," he says. "It's a very senior university academic appointment, and we do use human-resource firms for senior university appointments." Indeed, a recent Simon Fraser advertisement for just such an administrative appointment—a dean of the faculty of applied sciences—instructs applicants to send their CVs and references to Provence Consulting.

An endowed chair, however, is a tenured professorship. Klaus Rieckhoff, a professor emeritus of physics, former associate dean, and member of Simon Fraser's board of governors, says that in his three decades of university service, he's never heard of consultants being involved in faculty searches. Moreover, Duguid says that when the two previ-

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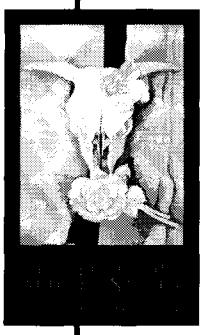

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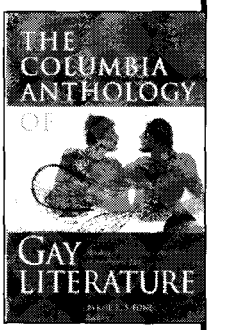

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ous holders of the Woodsworth chair, Alan Whitehorn and Edward Broadbent, were vetted for their two-year appointments, "no human-resource firm was employed to check or seek new references." And John Clague, who in 1998 assumed Simon Fraser's Gordon M. Shrum Chair in Science, says that "the university did not, to my knowledge, use a human-resources firm to interview people about my qualifications."

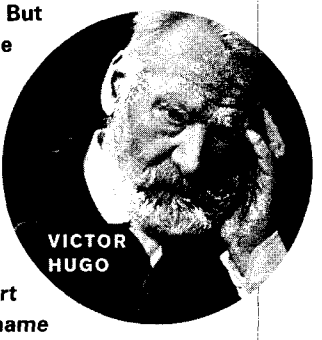
Whatever the university's regular procedures, its actions in the Noble case certainly raised questions. The administration initially provided Provence with Noble's references and a list of four additional people to contact: Linda Harasim of Simon Fraser, Stan Shapson of York, Stephen Fienberg of Carnegie Mellon University, and Sheila Embleton of York.

Early last February, Libby Dybikowski of Provence telephoned Noble and asked him if she could interview these four people. Noble was outraged. None of them had worked with him on academic matters, he notes, and three of them (Harasim, Shapson, and Fienberg) have been involved in projects that he has publicly criticized. Harasim, for instance, is director of Simon Fraser's Virtual University, one of several distance education projects Noble attacked in "Digital Diploma Mills." Fienberg was vice president of academics at York in the early 1990s and an advocate of a plan to create a permanent home at the school for the International Space University, an aeronautics and engineering institute. Noble organized faculty protests against the ISU, which he argued was cozy with the U.S. Department of Defense. (Noble also helped lead a faculty strike at York in 1997; the striking professors successfully demanded that the university curb its Internet ventures.)

When Noble did not allow Provence to contact any of the

SEQUEL RIGHTS

THE HEIRS OF FAMOUS WRITERS ARE A BUSY GROUP THESE days. Margaret Mitchell's nephews recently sued to prevent publication of *The Wind Done Gone,* a slave's-eye retelling of *Gone With the Wind.* But that's just the beginning. In France, the heirs of Victor Hugo have filed a lawsuit to ban *Cosette, ou Le temps des illusions,* a sequel to *Les misérables* in which Cosette and Marius are still trying to avoid the clutches of the evil Thénardier; it remains to be seen whether Hugo's heirs will pursue their case as zealously as Inspector Javert pursues Jean Valjean. And if your last name is Flaubert, it might be time to call your lawyer: Grasset, a French publisher, just came out with *La fille d'Emma,* a sequel to *Madame Bovary.*



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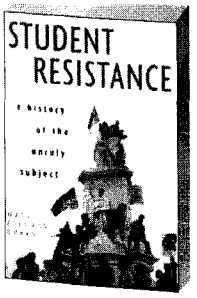
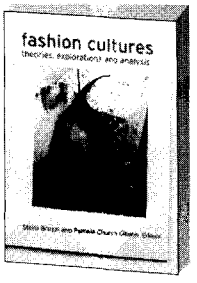


STUDENT RESISTANCE
Mark Edelman Boren



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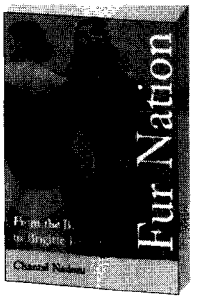

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people on its supplementary list, he was within his rights under British Columbia law. "I refused to participate in my own assassination," he says. He did, however, permit Provence to interview any of the dozen people who had written letters of recommendation on his behalf, including Ralph Nader and Noam Chomsky.

Provence did so, and among those it telephoned was Dan Schiller, a professor of communication at the University of California at San Diego. (Noble was a visiting professor in communication at UCSD in 1996.) Schiller was questioned about Noble's qualifications for about fifteen minutes, and he remembers feeling that "my positive remarks about Dave's scholarship were not enough." There was an effort "to elicit anything damaging" about Noble, Schiller recalls. "It's a little odd to be asked about the same thing three or four times in a row: Does he get aggressive? Does he start controversy?" Provence also contacted Phil Agre, a professor of information studies at UCLA. Like Schiller, Agre says that several of Provence's questions, including one about "whether I found him [Noble] intolerant of other people's views," led him to conclude that the firm "was soliciting discreditable information about David."

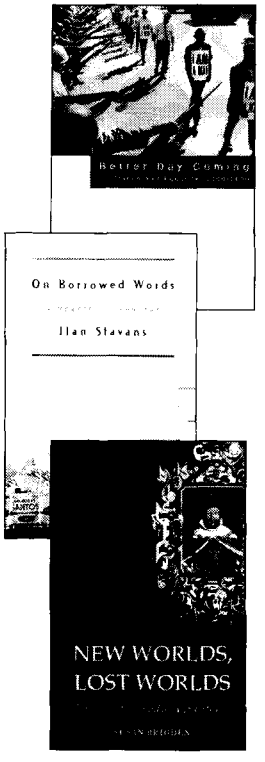
Noble did not fully cooperate with the consulting firm. "I refused to participate in my own assassination," he says.

In early May, Robert McChesney, a communications professor at the University of Illinois, solicited the signatures of more than 120 U.S. professors on a letter calling the Noble case "one of the single most important academic freedom cases in years.... This is SFU's moment of truth." The Simon Fraser Student Society also issued a letter of concern. Nonetheless, Noble's appointment did not stand.

On May 14, the University Appointments Committee, which is made up of seven Simon Fraser faculty members, recommended that due to procedural errors the search be reopened in the fall. "There is no obstacle to any candidate, including Professor Noble, who wishes to reapply," says Mitchell. But one of the procedural irregularities cited was Noble's refusal to cooperate with Provence: "There was a request for further references—because of the insufficiency of the references provided—that was denied," Mitchell explains.

Noble has argued in a complaint to the Canadian Association of University Teachers that he's being singled out for his politics: "I believe...that the blocking of my appointment stems from the SFU administration's opposition to my political views on matters of grave import," such as distance education. "There's a paradox in this," Noble says. "Would Woodsworth have been able to get the Woodsworth chair? No."

JOHN PALATTELLA



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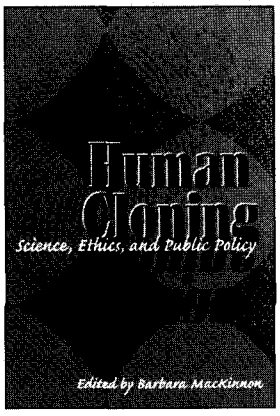

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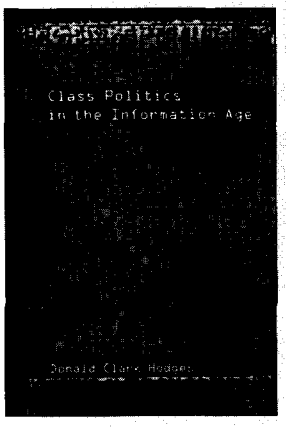

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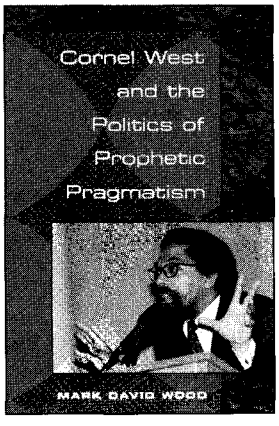

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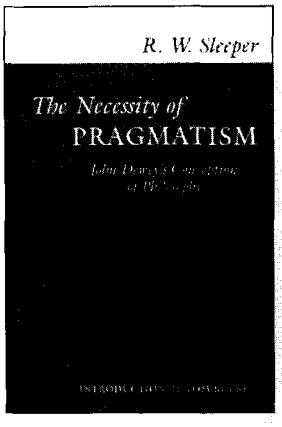

"In terms of scholarship, substance, and style, this book is a masterpiece in the original sense of the term. It is indispensable for comprehending Dewey's project in the manner he himself conceived this project."

— Vincent Colapietro, newsletter for the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy

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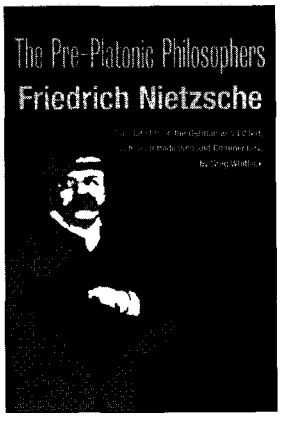

"A prodigious feat of scholarly research and an important contribution to Nietzsche scholarship. In the future, anyone interested in the evolution of Nietzsche's thought will simply have to pay attention to Whitlock's interpretation."

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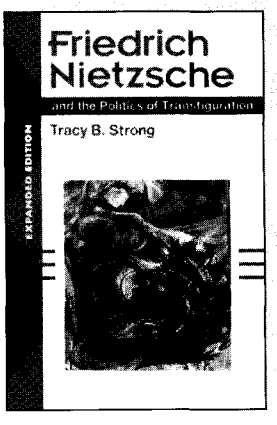

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— Robert C. Solomon, *International Studies in Philosophy*

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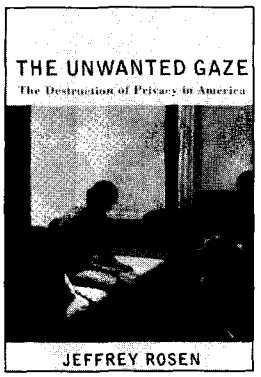

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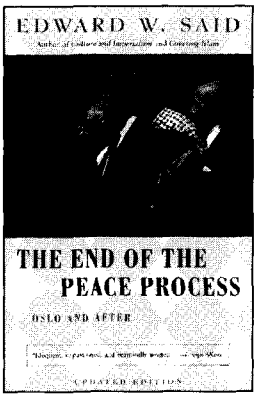
Edward W. Said



In this important collection of fifty pieces, Edward Said questions the very foundations of the Oslo Peace accords, realizing that the imbalance of power between the signees would set up a problematic dynamic, bringing only an illusionary stability. Together these essays are an eloquent, timely and courageous statement for peaceful coexistence and equality between two peoples, and for an end to the separation of Jews and non-Jews.

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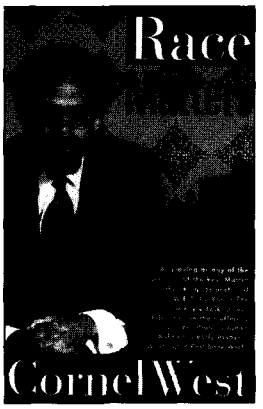

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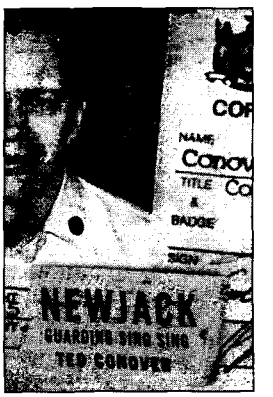

Ted Conover spent a year as a prison guard at Sing Sing. *Newjack*, his account of that experience, is a milestone in American journalism: a book that casts new and unexpected light on this nation's prison crisis and sets a new standard for courageous, in-depth reporting.

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Breakthrough Books

CUBA

WE ASKED FOUR SCHOLARS TO SUGGEST THE BEST RECENT BOOKS ON CUBA.

Roberto González Echevarría, professor of Hispanic and comparative literature at Yale University and author of *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball* (Oxford, 1999).

"The best book by a Cuban exile is ***Mi vida saxual*** (Editorial Plaza Mayor, 1998), a memoir by the great jazz saxophonist **Paquito D'Rivera**. Miraculously, D'Rivera's musical talents—his pitch, his tone, his sense of rhythm, his Bach-like capacity for interweaving motifs—carry over into his prose. But what is most captivating is his insider account of the world of Latin music, a world whose racial, economic, and social borders he crosses with a passport stamped by talent and dedication. D'Rivera writes engagingly about the social and musical interaction of players from Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Mexico, the United States, and other countries. The book contains texts by other musicians and a tremendous CD featuring much of the music discussed in the book. Within Cuba itself, **Pedro Juan Gutiérrez** is changing the direction of Cuban literature. ***Dirty Havana Trilogy*** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), just published in the United States, is a fine example of his so-called dirty realism. The book is a frank—some would say pornographic—depiction of marginal urban characters who survive in today's Cuba by selling sex. It is an underworld full of pathos, even tenderness, and Gutiérrez describes it in a deliberately artless way. Though such provocative subject matter has been known to make repressive governments nervous, Castro's cultural apparatus has left Gutiérrez alone, so far."

Eric Hershberg, Latin America program director at the Social Science Research Council and co-editor of *Constructing*

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Democracy: Human Rights, Citizenship, and Society in Latin America (Westview, 1996).

"American tourists are flocking to Cuba in numbers unseen for decades. American students, intellectuals, and journalists are ubiquitous in Havana today, their presence endorsed by Washington policy makers who expect the Castro regime to collapse once Cubans are exposed to the so-called American way of life. But as **Louis A. Pérez Jr.** makes clear in his masterful book ***On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*** (North Carolina, 1999), Cubans were exposed to the American way of life for decades before the revolution. Pérez's exhaustive study spans everything from baseball to music to consumption patterns to religious practices; he provides countless examples of the ways Cuban culture has been influenced by the habits of its huge neighbor across the Straits of Florida. Pérez stops his tale in 1960, but his historical perspective on the formation of Cuban identity helps explain Cubans' ongoing fascination with Americana despite a political context that would seem to discourage it. Cubans have not lost their thirst for Hollywood, professional baseball teams, and the latest stars in contemporary music or fashion. Pérez also shows us, however, that this open invitation to American cultural influence has not extended to political and economic matters. In those domains, the United States has been able to prevail in Cuba only through coercion."

Timothy Brennan, professor of cultural studies and comparative literature at the University of Minnesota and editor of Alejo Carpentier's *Music in Cuba* (Minnesota, 2001).

"Most of the best recent books about Cuba have been written by Cubans and are about Cuban music. Unfortunately, these books are rarely translated, and they rarely appear in high-profile editions. Many U.S. and European books merely attempt to cash in on the island's current trendiness in an age of cigar tourism and Ry Cooder–stoked romanticism. One exception is the brilliant urbanography ***Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*** (Wiley, 1997) by **Roberto Segre, Mario Coyula,** and **Joseph**

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L. Scarpaci. An exciting portrait of one of Latin America's most important cities, *Havana* takes us beyond the usual coffee-table-book photos of crumbling eighteenth-century archways, emphasizing instead the private experience of Havana's denizens. After assembling two definitive anthologies—***AfroCuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics, and Culture*** (Ocean Press, 1992) and ***No Longer Invisible: Afro-Latin Americans Today*** (Minority Rights Group, 1995)—**Pedro Pérez Sarduy** and **Jean Stubbs** recently published ***Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba*** (Florida, 2000). This trilogy may be the most important English-language study of Cuba published in the last decade. Though they refuse to idealize the state of race relations in Cuba, Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs nonetheless demonstrate that there, more than anywhere else in the New World, blacks have found individual and collective success and occupy real positions of power. The trilogy is at once theoretical and archival, filled with moving personal testimonies by black Cubans."

Esther Allen, translator and editor of *José Martí: Collected Works* (Penguin Classics, forthcoming).

"'Has any individual in U.S. history been so famous in his day, and now so forgotten, as Narciso López?' asks **Tom Chaffin** in ***Fatal Glory: Narciso López and the First Clandestine U.S. War Against Cuba*** (Virginia, 1996). With considerable verve, Chaffin tells the strange and illuminating story of López, a Venezuelan-born Cuban who in the mid-nineteenth century advocated the U.S. annexation of Cuba. In 1848, at the conclusion of the Mexican War, López worked with a group of wealthy Cubans to convince the U.S. government to offer up to $100 million to buy Cuba from Spain. (Senator Jefferson Davis, for one, took great interest in the plan: Cuba would have entered the Union as a slave state.) Spain refused the offer, and soon threw López out of Cuba for his part in a conspiracy—he had tried to persuade U.S. troops exiting Mexico to make a brief detour to 'liberate' Cuba before returning home. López spent the next couple of years in the United States, drumming up recruits and popular support for an invasion of Cuba. After a maneuver in 1850 during which he and five hundred American Southerners occupied the Cuban city of Cárdenas for all of a day, he became a famous figure in the United States, greeted by cheering crowds wherever he went. In 1851, he and a group of recruits attempted another invasion and were immediately captured by Spanish troops. Fifty-one of the Americans were put to death by a firing squad, and López was garroted. Chaffin's book is a timely and powerful reminder that relations between the United States and Cuba were complex and tortured long before the Cold War."

JOHN PALATTELLA

NEW FROM ZONE BOOKS

Metamorphosis and Identity
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In this book, noted historian Caroline Walker Bynum explores the medieval obsession with the nature of change and personal identity, confronting the question of why intellectuals, religious leaders, and ordinary people alike exhibited a precise and persistent desire to understand how the individual both changes and remains the same.

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— Peter Brown, Princeton University

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introduction by John Rajchman, translated by Anne Boyman

Newly translated and gathered into one volume for the first time, the essays in this book capture Gilles Deleuze's persistent search throughout his philosophical work for a new and superior form of empiricism that rethinks the relation of thought to life; an empiricism that would include the question of how we "experience" a life.

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With his well-known elegance of style and intellectual range, Steiner explores the idea of creation in western thought, literature, religion and history. He probes deeply into the driving forces of the human spirit and our perception of Western civilization's lengthening afternoon shadows. *Grammars of Creation* is a masterful volume of reflections with an eloquent evocation of the endlessness of beginning.

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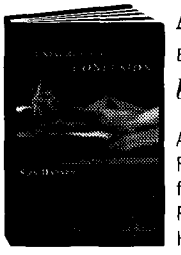

A Stay Against Confusion

Essays on Faith and Fiction

by Ron Hansen

All creative writing is, in the words of Robert Frost, "a stay against confusion." It tries to find a harmony from the chaos of everyday life. Religion has also functioned in this way for Ron Hansen, sharing with literature a reverence for mystery and using metaphors to communicate a supernatural order. Hansen brings together the literary and religious impulses that have influenced his life.

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The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse

by Louise Erdrich

For years, Father Damien has served the people of Ojibwe. Now, near the end of his life, he dreads the discovery of his identity, for he is a woman. He also knows the strange truth about Sister Leopolda's piety, but these facts are bound in his own secret. As he searches for answers, he wrestles with demons and memories from his past–and the secret of his identity in his revelatory last report to the Pope.

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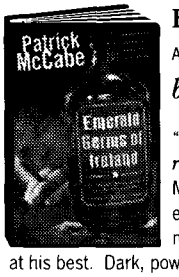

Emerald Germs of Ireland

A Novel

by Patrick McCabe

"There is something special about the relationship we all have with our mothers . . ." Meet Pat McNab, 45 years old and about to embark on a homicidal rampage sparked by matricide. Or is he? This is Patrick McCabe at his best. Dark, powerful, and surreal, *Emerald Germs of Ireland* is his funniest work to date. He has masterfully displayed the anarchic twists and turns that are the hallmarks of his comic genius.

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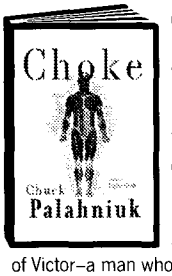

Choke

by Chuck Palahniuk

The author of the international sensation *Fight Club*, Chuck Palahniuk introduces his new novel, *Choke*. He gives a vision of life, love, sex and mortality that is both chillingly brilliant and teeth-rattlingly funny. He reveals the story of Victor–a man who devises a scam to pay for his mother's elder care. Victor pretends to choke in restaurants and leaves the person who "saves him" to feel responsible for him for the rest of their lives.

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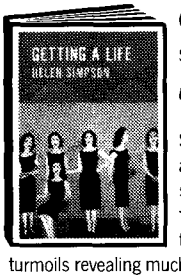

Getting a Life

Stories

by Helen Simpson

Simpson's nine witty stories reveal the bliss and irritations of domestic life. A 17 year-old student walks toward her future resolved not to be anything like her mother. In a small café, two teachers become tipsy and exchange family turmoils revealing much more than they intended. Poetry and money collide head on at a Robert Burns gala at a Mayfair hotel. These are the stories of people at home, at work and at play. Simpson's stories have a comic lightness born of rigorous craft.

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Comic Book Nation

The Transformation of Youth Culture in America

by Bradford W. Wright

Comic Book Nation offers an engaging and provocative history of the comic book industry in American society. In every genre–war, superhero, romance, crime and horror, Wright finds that illustrators and writers use the medium to address a variety of serious issues, including racism, economic injustice, fascism, drug abuse and teenage alienation. He offers a serious study of popular culture and an entertaining look at an enduring American art form.

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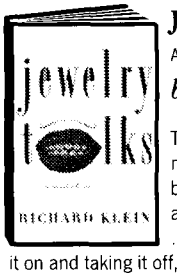

Jewelry Talks

A Novel Thesis

by Richard Klein

Three narratives are interwoven in this playful novel: the autobiography of Abby Zinzo–a brilliant transgendered aesthete who has lived a life "devoted almost entirely to my jewelry . . . a life consumed by adornment–by putting it on and taking it off, all the while transfixed by the strange light that jewelry casts on those who wear it." *Jewelry Talks* shares the story of a relationship between two men unsure of their sexuality and Zinzo's college thesis–an erudite analysis of the meaning of jewelry from ancient times to the present.

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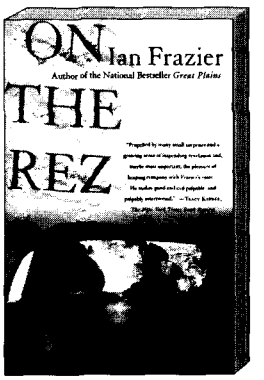
Ian Frazier



This unflinching account of today's Native American experience concerns the Oglala Sioux. With typical wit and insight, Frazier profiles the descendants of Crazy Horse and Black Elk, who now inhabit one of the poorest places in America: South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. "[Frazier is] an archeologist of social sensibilities, paying rapt attention to dialect, landscapes, sounds, and political quirks."—*The New Yorker*

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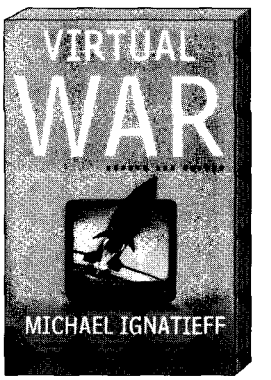
Virtual War

Kosovo and Beyond

Michael Ignatieff



Ignatieff describes the latest phase in modern combat: war fought by remote control. He shows how and why Kosovo was just such a conflict, in which US and NATO forces did the fighting but only Kosovars and Serbs did the dying. "If you are trying to understand the role of ethnic conflicts in our world today, Ignatieff is one of the best guides."—Peter Maass, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*

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Asking Around

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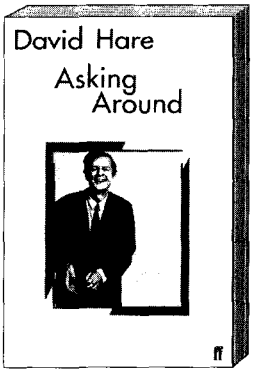

David Hare's landmark trilogy of plays—*Racing Demon*, *Murmuring Judges*, and *The Absence of War*—explored the rampant social unrest of early-1990s Britain. These candid interviews, all conducted by Hare over five years, formed the primary research for that trilogy. "When future historians [study] Britain in the late twentieth century, Hare will be the playwright they turn to first." —Blake Morrison, *Independent on Sunday*

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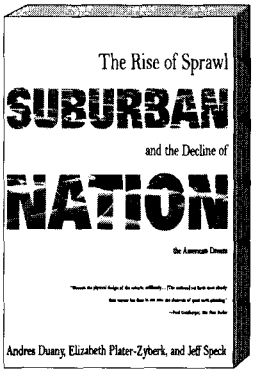

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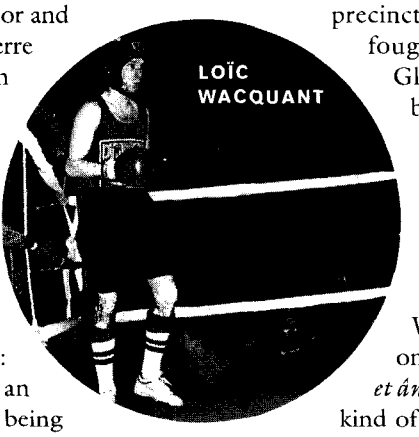
THE PUGILISTIC PROFESSOR

BOXING HAS LONG MESMERIZED INTELLECTUALS. From Martin Heidegger to Jean-Paul Sartre (who was known to don the gloves on occasion) to the Dadaist poet and professional boxer Arthur Cravan, writers and philosophers have analyzed—and often romanticized—the sweet science. In this country, one need look no further than Norman Mailer, who has characterized boxing as "existential" and described Muhammad Ali as "the swiftest embodiment of human intelligence."

The French-born sociologist Loïc Wacquant might seem to belong to this intellectual tradition. A UC-Berkeley professor and disciple of the social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, Wacquant is known to some as "the boxing sociologist." Having already published several articles on the sport, he has finally published a book in France on his life as a boxer in training at a Chicago gym. *Corps et âme: Carnets ethnographiques d'un apprenti boxeur* (Body and soul: Ethnographic notebooks of an apprentice boxer) is currently being considered for American publication by the University of Chicago, University of California, and Harvard University Presses.



Wacquant's story, like his understanding of boxing, is unique. In 1988, he began working out at a gym in the impoverished Chicago neighborhood of Woodlawn. At the time, he had no intention of becoming a serious boxer; the gym, he thought, would simply offer a "window on the ghetto," an ideal vantage point from which to observe the "social strategies" of the local youth. It would, in short, be a good place to research the dissertation—on the roles of race, class, and the state in the remaking of the ghetto—that he was writing under the supervision of the sociologist William Julius Wilson, then at the University of Chicago.

At first, Wacquant was uneasy in the ring, and his apprehension was only compounded by the fact that he was a white, moderately athletic Frenchman knocking heads with experienced locals. (Sparring with a towering pugilist named Butch, Wacquant had to resist the impulse to mutter "sorry" through his plastic mouthpiece after landing a straight right square in his partner's face.) But Wacquant's initial anxieties did not dissuade him from pursuing his burgeoning interest. Training three to six times a week for three years, he shadowboxed and sparred by day and typed up his notes by night. Attending some thirty tournaments, he went on the road to observe fighters up close. He also witnessed the routines of their daily lives, their struggles to find jobs and homes, and their occasional visits to the welfare office or the local police precinct. In 1990, Wacquant even fought in the Chicago Golden Gloves, the largest amateur boxing tournament in the Midwest. (He lost his three-round fight by decision.)

After Bourdieu visited Wacquant at the Woodlawn gym and bestowed his blessings on his pupil's avocation, Wacquant began serious work on a sociology of boxing. *Corps et âme* is surprisingly short on the kind of rhapsodic effusions that are typically found in highbrow boxing analysis. Wacquant explains that he purposely avoided the "prefabricated exoticism" so common to depictions of the sport. Indeed, part of his intention is to discredit what he calls the "boxing myth." Contrary to Mailer and company, he contends that boxing is better understood as a craft or a job than as an art form. In Wacquant's eyes, the gym is essentially a factory or workshop where the boxer undergoes a highly repetitive training routine that fashions his body into a kind of tool. "I have to do my homework," "I have to do my job": These are the sorts of phrases that boxers use, he notes, when talking about their training.

Wacquant also downplays the "rags to riches" stories that one associates with boxers like Mike

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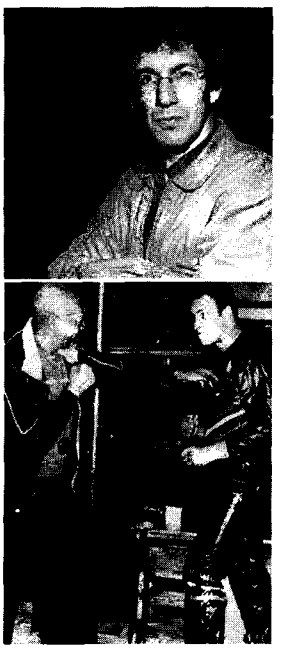

LOÏC WACQUANT (TOP); DEEDEE ARMOUR AND MUHAMMAD ALI (BOTTOM)

Ever the sociologist, Wacquant speculates that there may be a correlation between a boxer's social status and his performance in the ring.

Tyson, who escaped the ghetto to achieve wealth and fame. He emphasizes that the Woodlawn boxers generally come from working-class backgrounds rather than from the more destitute sectors of the ghetto. (Many of his fellow trainees had at least some community college education.) Wacquant even speculates that there may be a positive correlation between a boxer's social status and his performance in the ring. At the same time, he notes that the rewards of a successful boxing career are easily exaggerated. (The boxers in his gym assumed that their local hero Alphonzo Ratliff had been paid somewhere in the range of a million dollars a fight, when in fact the figure was at most thirty thousand dollars.)

Though Wacquant is reluctant to employ the nostalgic devices of the memoir, *Corps et âme* does recount and draw on his own training, with blow-by-blow accounts of his sparring bouts and a moving description of how he earned his affectionate nicknames, "The French Hammer" and "Busy Louie." He even confides that he came to embrace the legendary local trainer DeeDee Armour as his "second father."

With its mixture of sociological analysis, ethnographic observation, and literary evocation, Wacquant's book combines scrupulous attention to physical details with an ambitious theoretical framework in a manner that would make his mentor Bourdieu proud. (In fact, Bourdieu has asked Wacquant to send a copy of his book to every professor at the Collège de France, the prestigious research institution where Bourdieu holds the chair of sociology.) Above all, Wacquant hopes to shape a "carnal sociology" that pays close attention to the physical experiences of its subjects. "It was an analytical and sensual challenge," he says. "I wanted to give an explanation of the social world that would not drown out its sound and fury. Instead of practicing a form of sociology that would flatten everything out, I wanted to show that boxers are linked to that world with every fiber of their body and that sociology could take that into account."

For further elaboration of what exactly carnal sociology is, readers will have to wait for Wacquant's next boxing opus, "La passion du pugiliste," on which he is currently hard at work. Wacquant is developing ideas about the interplay of desire, gender, and the sacred in the ring. Boxing, he points out, is in some respects a monastic routine: The boxer imposes on himself strict dietary restrictions, a tight schedule that includes early bedtimes and fixed hours of practice, and—for several weeks before a fight—sexual abstinence.

Reactions to *Corps et âme* in France have been positive. The French press has largely focused on the depiction of Chicago's black underclass and on the novelty of "Busy Louie" himself. Former boxers have written Wacquant to praise the book's true-to-life feel and its acute observations about the workings of the boxing world. After one of Wacquant's readings in Paris, a woman in the audience said that his uncanny depiction of the pugilist's psyche had finally made clear to her why she and her former boxer boyfriend had never hit it off. "I should open a couples therapy workshop for boxers," Wacquant says jokingly.

Perhaps the most unusual reaction to Wacquant's writing came after the book's most colorfully written section, "Busy Louie aux Golden Gloves," was published in a French literary magazine. This "sociological short story," as Wacquant calls it, tells the tale of his participation in the Chicago Golden Gloves. The piece prompted a phone call to Wacquant from the French publishing house Editions du Seuil. It was dying to print his "novel."

ELISABETH FRANCK

THE KRAUS FILES

IN A CELEBRATED SKIT ON *MONTY PYTHON'S Flying Circus,* a young man, sitting at his desk, writes a joke so funny that he dies laughing after reading it back to himself. His mother enters the room, reads the joke thinking it is a suicide note, and falls to the floor, also dying of laughter. Finally, government linguists, working in teams on small sections of the joke, translate it into German—one translator who handles too large a piece is maimed—and British soldiers fighting at the front broadcast the translated joke through loudspeakers. In this way, Britain defeats Germany in World War II.

Karl Kraus, the one-of-a-kind fin de siècle Viennese satirist, playwright, and aphorist, aspired to be like the young man in the skit, only without killing himself. And his courageous translators face the same dangerous task as the skit's government linguists: to bottle Kraus's lethal wit without blowing themselves up.

This July, the University of Illinois Press is scheduled to publish Kraus's *Dicta and Contradicta.* The volume includes, for the first time in English, the entire text of Kraus's first book of aphorisms. (He eventually published

COURTESY OF LOÏC WACQUANT

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three.) Kraus culled these compact witticisms and aperçus from the pages of his journal, *Die Fackel* (The Torch), which he edited from 1899 until his death in 1936. From 1911 onward, he wrote the entire contents of each issue himself.

KARL KRAUS

The notion that corrupt language betrays corrupt thought preoccupied Kraus, and the mission of *Die Fackel* was to expose such moral and linguistic failings with incisive and penetrating quips. ("Prostitutes and journalists share the ability to numb themselves," he wrote. "Prostitutes have the added ability not to numb themselves.") In 1905, he published aphorisms by Oscar Wilde, a writer he deeply admired. ("There are two sorts of writers," Kraus noted. "Those who are, and those who aren't. With the first, content and form belong together, like soul and body; with the second, they merely match, like body and clothes.") To a considerable degree, Kraus imitated Wilde's contradiction-embracing spirit and the aphoristic form it took, which had enjoyed its own long history in German culture.

Though Kraus hoped to obliterate the hypocrisy encrusted in the language that surrounded him, he also worried that society had fallen too far behind to heed his message. ("The Superman is a premature ideal," he wrote, "presupposing man.") Kraus called Vienna "the proving ground of world destruction," and he turned out to be right. Still, he managed to harbor some hope for the future. "My readers believe that I write for the moment, because I write from the moment," he explained. "So I have to wait until my works are outdated. Perhaps then they will be up to date."

According to Harry Zohn, a professor emeritus of German at Brandeis who in the 1970s produced the first great postwar translations of Kraus's work, Kraus's overall attitude was "no compromise." That unyielding ethos influenced many of the writers, artists, and philosophers who went on to shape the vocabulary of modern intellectual expression, including Ludwig Wittgenstein ("Thought is servant," Kraus wrote, "and language is mistress"), Adolph Loos, Hermann Broch, Robert Musil, Walter Benjamin, Arnold Schoenberg, and Else Lasker-Schüler.

Zohn feels that a new edition of *Dicta and Contradicta* is needed today more than ever before. "Kraus wrote that his was a language-forsaken age," Zohn explains. "Ours is even more so than his was a hundred years ago. They started by processing cheese. Now they're processing words." Zohn himself has tried to generate aphorisms in Kraus's image, in part to illustrate the difficulty of capturing his at once playful and coiled rhetoric.

But the actual task of translating Kraus's aphorisms in *Dicta and Contradicta* fell to Jonathan McVity. By vocation, McVity is an antiques dealer in Charlottesville, Virginia. By avocation, he is a fierce Krausian—the only kind there is. "You know those authors you read when you're young—authors who stick in your mind?" he asks. "You digest them, they become part of your muscles, your bloodstream."

McVity began his translations of Kraus merely as a poetic drill. "I took the Stendhal approach—I'd just sit down and hack away," he says. "Kraus is so focused on language and sentence structure, it's a good weight-lifting exercise." It took him eighteen months to complete his translation of Kraus's 918 aphorisms. (Aphorism #918: "You don't even live once.") McVity never thought of publishing his translation, but when he gave a bound copy as a Christmas gift to a friend, the friend recommended that he publish it.

According to McVity, the complicated relationship between Kraus's radicalism and his conservatism is what makes him such an interesting figure to revisit today. Kraus hated militarism in all its forms, for instance, but also vehemently opposed feminism. "His social position was as a hypergadfly," McVity says. Consider some of Kraus's barbed criticisms: "The mission of the press is to spread culture while destroying the attention span"; "Whether in manufacturing, in literature, in law, music, medicine or drama: in the sacred world of the mind there is no escape from the ubiquitous power of the military"; "So many people write because they lack the character not to." McVity sees aspects of Kraus in policy mavericks like Noam Chomsky, George Soros, and the late Paul Feyerabend—in "the dog that bites your cuff and won't let go."

But for all Kraus's political intricacies, "the most painful part" of translating his work into modern English, according to McVity, is capturing his ingenious and assiduous wordplay. "It's very satisfying once it slides into place," he notes. "It's just awfully hard." Zohn adds that Kraus's obsession with linguistic precision is what makes him at once terribly relevant and almost impossible to translate into meaningful contemporary terms. "The challenge is one of aesthetics," he says. "To make a mistake, to misinterpret a sentence, is a capital crime."

AARON RETICA

"So many people write because they lack the character not to."
—Karl Kraus

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SERF RISING

NINETEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA PRODUCED A number of remarkable literary lives but few quite like Aleksandr Nikitenko's. Born into serfdom in 1804, Nikitenko was a precocious student who fantasized about attending the university at St. Petersburg, which he imagined "in the form of a temple, radiant with light, inhabited by peace and truth." Liberal society took up Nikitenko's cause and shamed his owner, Count Sheremetev, into emancipating the would-be scholar in 1824. After realizing his educational aspirations, the ex-serf went on to a distinguished career as a censor of literature in the service of the imperial government.

For most of his adult life, Nikitenko kept a daily journal cataloging his political opinions and his meetings as a censor with closely scrutinized writers such as Aleksandr Pushkin and Nikolay Gogol. (A selection from those journals was published in English in 1975 as *The Diary of a Russian Censor.*) In the 1850s, Nikitenko began writing a memoir of his childhood and liberation, which was published in 1888 with a title that translates literally as *My Story About Myself.* Yale University Press has now brought out the memoir in English for the first time; translator Helen Saltz Jacobson has given her version a more suggestive title: *Up From Serfdom: My Childhood and Youth in Russia, 1804–1824.*

BETTMANN/CORBIS

Nikitenko became one of Russia's leading censors.

Nikitenko is best known for his career as a censor; according to his admirers, he struck a careful balance between his obligation to protect the state's interests and his respect for literature on its own terms. Though many censors were tone-deaf bureaucrats, the censorship corps did include a few literary talents like Ivan Goncharov, the author of *Oblomov,* and the poet Fedor Tiutchev. Among the best in his field, Nikitenko was respected by Pushkin and is credited with suggesting minor but critical revisions that permitted the publication of Gogol's *Dead Souls.*

Up From Serfdom is unusual for its focus on Nikitenko's youth in bondage. For the most part, scholars of Russian literature have regarded his childhood as little more than a curiosity. The title *Up From Serfdom* might seem to promise a narrative comparable to the classic autobiographies of freed American slaves. But the analogy is somewhat forced. Though Nikitenko had a hard youth—each time his father lost a job as a teacher or estate clerk, the family was dislocated and fell into stark poverty—he nevertheless managed to read Plato and Montesquieu. He was whipped, yes—but by his father. And unlike the American slave narratives that doubled as abolitionist propaganda, Nikitenko's writings were not published until a quarter century after Tsar Alexander II had emancipated all serfs in Russia.

Though Nikitenko's life as a serf was atypical, his memoir is nonetheless one of the best surviving accounts of Russian serfdom. "We have very little material from the bottom up from the serfs," says Peter Kolchin, a historian at the University of Delaware and the author of *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom.* Of fewer than ten such firsthand accounts, he notes, Nikitenko's memoir "is the longest and most complete."

Why aren't there more? "Russia was not a democracy," Kolchin points out. The lack of press freedom made publication of abolitionist pamphlets far more difficult than it was in the United States. Furthermore, he says, "Russia was not divided into slave and free territories, so there was no free half from which one could attack the slave half." Vehement opposition to serfdom tended to come from Russian exiles like the radical Aleksandr Herzen; within Russia, "whatever was published had to be more Aesopian." In other words, whatever was published had to pass muster with Nikitenko and his fellow censors.

Nikitenko lobbied to free his family members and celebrated Alexander II's emancipation proclamation, but over the years he grew wary of how far equality should be extended. "I am a plebeian from head to toe, but I do not accept the idea that it is wise to give the people power," he wrote in his journal in 1860. "There will always be some who stand out above the rest."

BLAKE ESKIN

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FIRST CUT

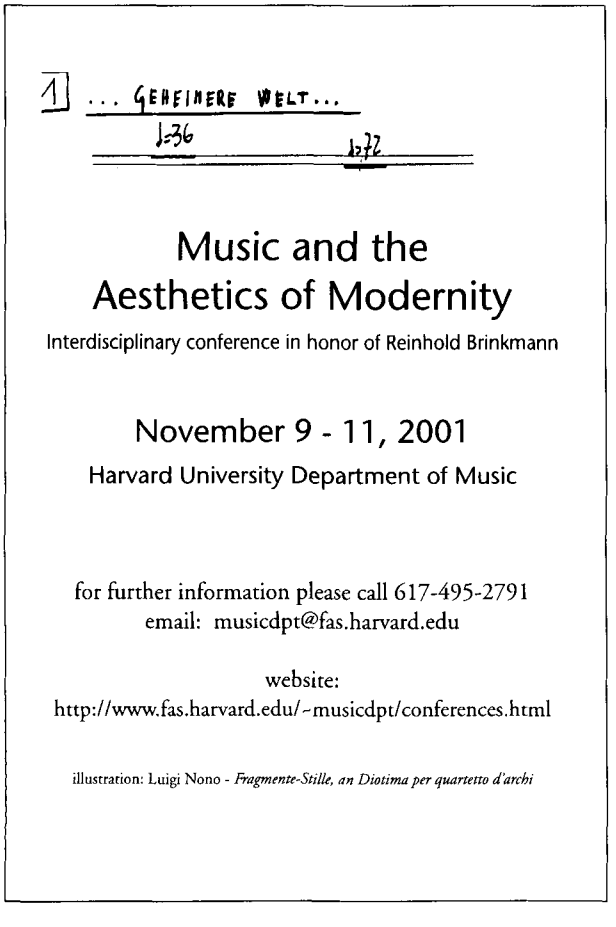
ALL ACADEMICS LIVE BY THE MAXIM "PUBLISH or perish," but it's the younger members of the species to whom the metaphor of survival of the fittest literally applies. Thus younger scholars had good reason to be dismayed by the news that a recent issue of *PMLA*, the flagship journal for literary studies, consisted entirely of solicited articles. If leading journals are not open to unsolicited essays, articles, and reviews, how are young scholars supposed to publish their work? How fairly can beginners in the profession expect to be treated?

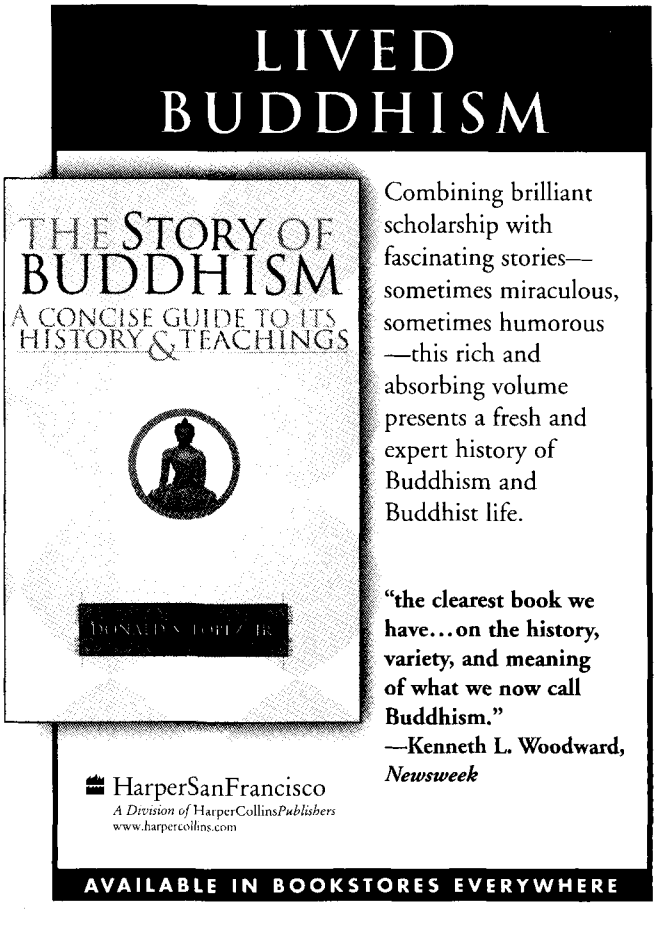
To investigate these questions, I sent out an e-mail query that elicited two highly illustrative responses from young literature scholars. The first scholar reports that an article submitted to a leading journal in her field was held for more than a year, only to be rejected because it allegedly displayed inadequate knowledge of relevant secondary material. (Ironically, the author's own dissertation, from which the article was adapted, was included in the reviewers' list of secondary sources she should have cited.) The second scholar tells of submitting an article to a well-known interdisciplinary journal, waiting for roughly eight months, and then receiving a rejection letter that thanked him for the excellent article but rejected it on the grounds that the journal publishes primarily solicited contributions. Yet no indication of such a policy had been provided in the journal's Notes to Contributors—if anything, the notes imply the opposite.

The history of the *PMLA*'s treatment of manuscripts shows how the attempt to establish a fair and unbiased review process has unexpectedly impaired today's publishing procedure. In 1979, the journal adopted a policy of double blind review, under which each submission gets sent off, without explicit indication of authorship, to two reviewers. This policy, though not without its critics—Stanley Fish wrote a prominent 1988 dissent, arguing that an article by a big name (like Stanley Fish) was intrinsically more important than the same article by an unknown—was widely praised. Even the most humble petitioner, it seemed, would be guaranteed a fair hearing.

But the unintended side effect of this policy has been to create an additional layer of bureaucracy and delay. Editors are not permitted to use their discretion to weed out unpromising manuscripts. All articles now have to be copied, forwarded, and returned, and editors are unable

Can young scholars expect fair treatment from journals?

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At *PMLA*, the number of submissions plunged from 660 in 1977 to 191 in 2000.

to respond to contributors until they hear from readers. The referees, for their part, have insufficient incentives to expedite the process. In the words of the University of Warwick English professor Derek Hughes, who referees for a journal with a similar policy: "There are few inducements, other than public-spiritedness or self-importance, to undertake the reading of often incompetent submissions."

Following the switch to double blind reviews, many scholars stopped submitting to *PMLA* altogether. As the journal's editor, Carlos J. Alonso, wrote in the January 2001 issue, the number of submissions plunged from 660 in 1977 to 191 in 2000. To compensate for this shortfall, the journal began announcing special-topic issues and soliciting some articles in 1986. Alonso, while noting that refereed publication remains important, suggests that *PMLA* ought to "take a hard look inward" to figure out why so many scholars are sending their work elsewhere.

Double blind, it seems, can be a double bind. But whatever the problems with double blind reviews, few scholars would want a return to the days when getting published was in large part a matter of having the right contacts and connections. If the double blind policy is to be retained, how can it be implemented more efficiently? *PMLA* can look to a number of publications renowned for blind review *and* speedy, substantive responses as models. Notably, one factor common to such journals is that they all grant their editors permission to take an active hand in screening submissions before sending on the rest for outside review. The journal *Novel,* according to its editor, Nancy Armstrong, reads submissions within approximately two weeks, promptly rejecting essays that don't meet the journal's description of the kind of scholarship it favors.

George Rowe, editor of *Comparative Literature,* describes a similar procedure at his journal: "At least half of the submissions we get never make it to the board, and in those instances we get back to the author within two weeks. Most of these 'quick' decisions have to do with essays' not being suitable for the journal—not 'comparative,' people not working in the original languages, too short, et cetera.... Some of them have to do with quality, or lack thereof." For the essays that are refereed externally, both *Novel* and *Comparative Literature* aim for an acceptance or a substantive rejection within four months.

The British journal *The Modern Language Review* boasts an even quicker response time.

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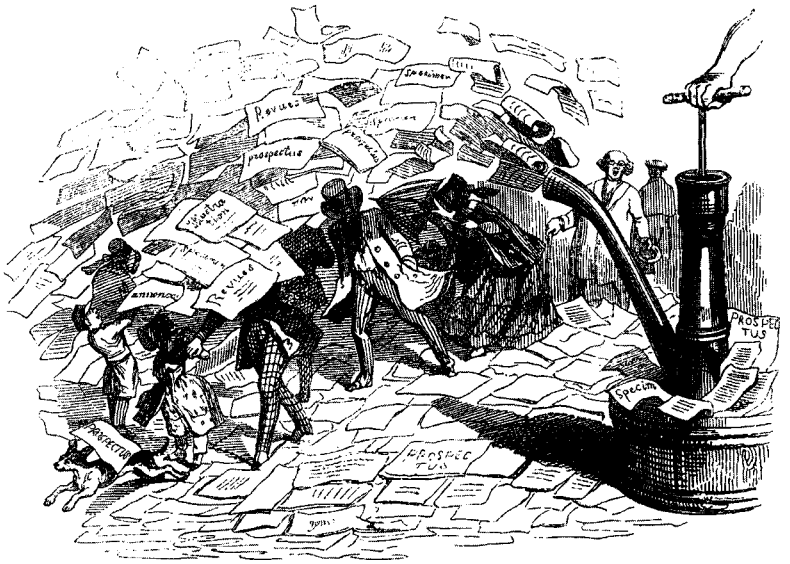
According to Ritchie Robertson, editor of the Germanic section, scholars can expect to hear within two months—and hearing within one month is quite common. "We rely on a large body of reliable reviewers," explains Robertson, "and are always seeking to draw in new colleagues, not only from Britain." An additional reason for the greater British efficiency is the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), the governmental review every five years of each university department's research productivity, which encourages quick decisions. Though few would welcome the bureaucracy-heavy RAE in the United States, the British example shows that despite academics' perennial complaints about being overworked and underpaid, timely response to submissions is possible.

Given the sensitive ideological fault lines of academia, some scholars may be timid about granting individual editors the power to make a nonblind "first cut." But no review process, however carefully designed, can be absolutely free of bias. Scholars should accept that a certain amount of bias is part of publishing and that the most drastic cures for this ailment are often worse than the disease itself. The payoff is that anonymous manuscripts that survive a first cut are likely to receive detailed and speedy consideration.



With the promise of substantive criticism, if not acceptance, most young scholars would be happy to wait a few months for a response. It's far better than being effectively shut out of a system on ostensible grounds of "fairness" only to see big names sounding off in special issues in one's place.

JEFFERSON CHASE

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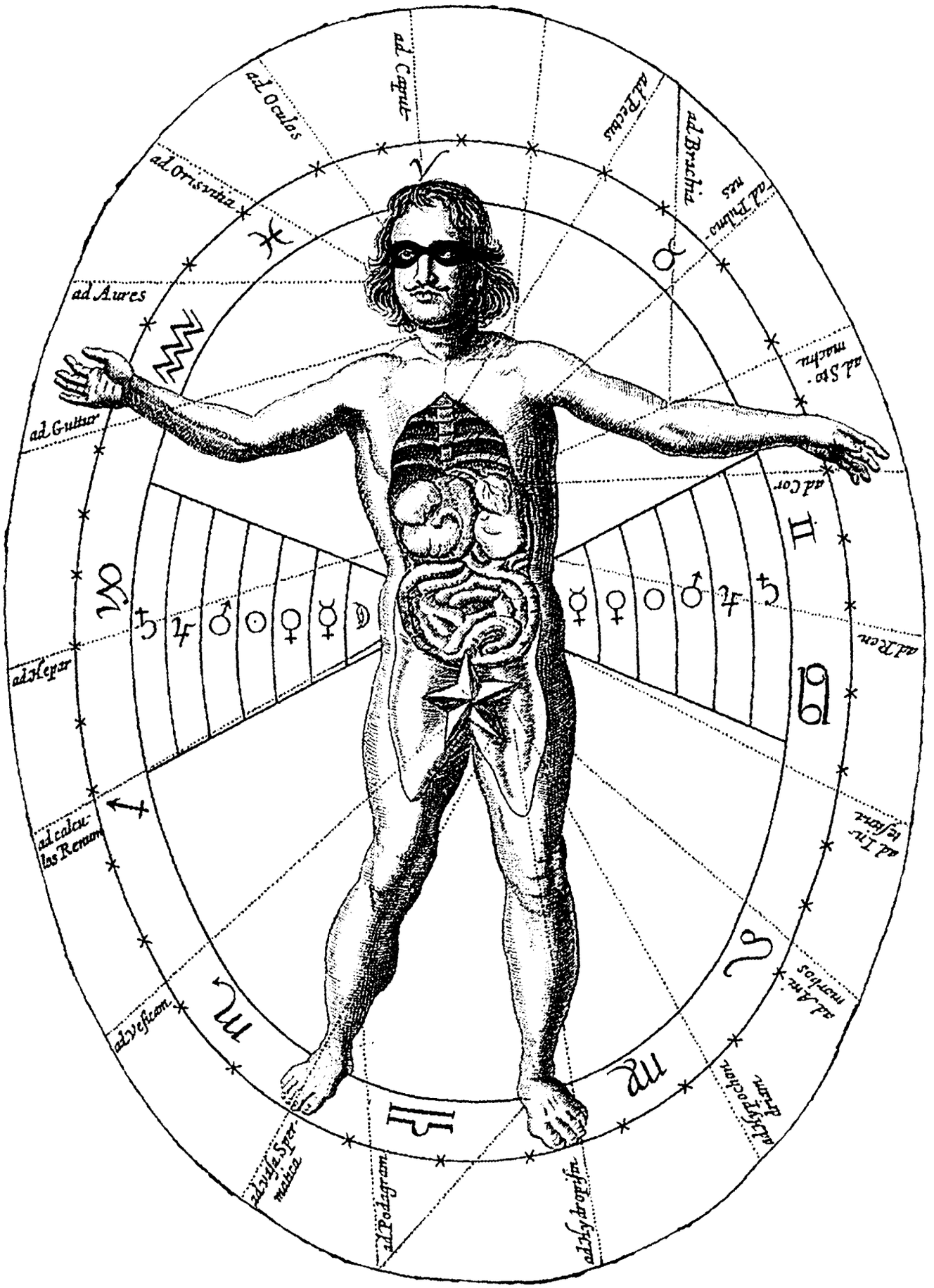

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THE MYSTERY OF THE MILLIONAIRE METAPHYSICIAN

BY **JAMES RYERSON**

IN JUNE 2000, THE PHILOSOPHER DEAN Zimmerman moved from the University of Notre Dame to Syracuse University with his wife and three kids, only to see their new house catch fire the day they moved in. Much of what they owned was destroyed. "We were out of the house for six months," he recalls. "It was a miserable experience."

The week after the fire, Zimmerman got a fortune cookie at a Chinese restaurant that brought encouraging news: "You will move to a wonderful new home within the year," it read. Zimmerman, a metaphysician with side interests in resurrection and divine eternity, was heartened by the prophecy. And when he returned to the restaurant three months later, his second fortune was equally promising: "A way out of a financial mess is discovered as if by magic!"

The next day Zimmerman received a letter from the A.M. Monius Institute. Printed on official-looking stationery and signed by the institute's director, Netzin Steklis, the letter offered Zimmerman a "generous" sum of money to review a sixty-page work of metaphysics titled "Coming to Understanding." As the letter explained, the institute "exists for the primary purpose of disseminating the work 'Coming to Understanding' and encouraging its critical review and improvement." For Zimmerman's philosophical services, the institute was prepared to pay him the astronomical fee of twelve thousand U.S. dollars.

Meanwhile, three thousand miles away in England, the University of Reading philosopher Jonathan Dancy returned from a short vacation to find his house in dire need of repairs. He also discovered a letter waiting for him. "I arrived home thinking that the roof has collapsed and I must do something about it," he remembers. "I wasn't sure how I was going to do it."

Dancy's letter from the A.M. Monius Institute made him the same remarkable offer that had been made to Zimmerman. "I thought, this is very weird," Dancy says. "At first, I thought they were offering me twelve *hundred* dollars." And the roof? "This was a godsend," he says, "as far as that goes."

Zimmerman and Dancy were not the only scholars who received lucrative offers—and ultimately payment—from the institute. Soon the roster had grown to include at least nine other philosophers: Ermanno Bencivenga of the University of California at Irvine; Jan Cover of Purdue University; John Hawthorne of Syracuse University; Trenton Merricks of the University of Virginia; Eugene Mills of Virginia Commonwealth University; Gideon Rosen of Princeton University; Michael Scriven of Claremont Graduate University; Theodore Sider of Syracuse University; and Ted Warfield of the University of Notre Dame.

The institute's letter claimed that a "very substantial sum" had been earmarked to help contribute to "the revival of traditional metaphysics." Given the number of philosophers involved, that sum was at least in the neighborhood of $125,000. Who could afford to spend that much money on philosophy? And of those who could, who would want to? No one had a clue.

The institute, for its part, was maddeningly secretive. Many of the philosophers spoke by telephone with Steklis, who refused to disclose any information about the author of the manuscript, the institute's funding, or her superiors. ("She made these mysterious references to 'the board,'" Zimmerman remembers.) As instructed, the philosophers downloaded "Coming to Understanding" from the institute's Web site, www.ammonius.com. Then, with a collective sense of puzzlement and excited disbelief, they awaited the arrival of their contracts in the mail.

To judge from both the reviewer's contract and "Coming to Understanding" itself, the institute meant business. For one thing, the manuscript, signed by one A.M. Monius, suggested the handiwork of a serious thinker—not a prankster. "It didn't seem like a joke," Zimmerman says. "It wasn't *that* funny. It was clearly the work of a fairly able writer—a smart person, one capable of making some gross philosophical errors while at the same time having some clever ideas." Theodore Sider was pleasantly surprised. "To tell you the

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truth," he says, "when I actually got into it, I enjoyed it." Dancy concurs: "There are enterprises you wouldn't want to be associated with. But I was much reassured by the work. It was better than many manuscripts I had refereed for leading publishers. It was at least different."

The contract looked even more professional. Written in fluent legalese, it featured an eleven-point list of terms and conditions, including the requirement that the reviewer had published "an article (not merely a review) in *The Journal of Philosophy, The Philosophical Review, Mind, The Monist, Noûs,* and/or *The Review of Metaphysics.*" Reviewers were offered the choice of writing a "substantial critical review" or a "testimonial." A review meant a "reasoned criticism (whether favorable or unfavorable)" that offered "detailed positive suggestions" for improving the work; it had to be at least thirty pages long and "consistent with professional standards regarding reviews in full. (Only Ted Warfield chose to write a testimonial.) "My hourly rate went way up," noted one reviewer, who wished not to be identified. Merricks, who received a three-thousand-dollar bonus for his review, laughs when he confesses that he spent the extra money on LASIK eye surgery. "It's so embarrassing," he says sheepishly. "I could never justify paying the money under normal circumstances. But with the bonus—bada bing!"

Eventually the excitement of actually having been paid began to die down. But curiosity about the institute and the identity of the author only continued to grow. "It is certainly the most bizarre philosophical undertaking in anyone's memory," Zimmerman contends. "It's unheard of. It's insane. You ordinarily get paid two hundred dollars by Oxford to review a six-hundred-page book." A few inquisitive reviewers snooped around and made some preliminary Web searches and telephone terhead put me in contact with the institute's voice mail, which I called for several weeks without a reply. In addition, the letterhead listed a bricks-and-mortar address in Pennsylvania. On a map, it appeared to be located at the end of a small road just off Interstate 95, near the New Jersey–Pennsylvania border.

In a reverse-address directory, the institute matched three other telephone numbers, all under the name Jitendrah Shah. When I called one of these numbers, I reached a computer-sales business. I asked for Netzin Steklis and was assured that I had the wrong number. I called back several times, asking repeatedly for the A.M. Monius Institute until I provoked an irritated outburst: "Their number is 321-5809!" I asked the man how he had come to know the number so suddenly. "Why don't you ask them?" he barked back. "You want to buy a computer, you talk to me." Then he hung up.

The A.M. Monius Institute exists to promote a sixty-page work of metaphysics titled "Coming to Understanding." For critical reviews of this treatise, the institute was offering philosophers twelve thousand dollars.

of this nature." Alternatively, for a two-page testimonial that would "praise 'Coming to Understanding' and highlight its merits and significance," the institute was willing to pay four thousand dollars.

Despite the institute's evident professionalism, its anonymity and mysteriousness made reviewers skittish—even after they had received countersigned contracts. "Some of us were wondering, what the hell? Is this for real?" says Jan Cover. Sider acknowledges that "it was a bit of a risk, because I had no idea who these people were." Dancy assumed that he had only a "one-in-ten chance" of getting paid and confesses that he is "still wary about the whole affair." Trenton Merricks shares that anxiety, noting that he had hoped A.M. Monius was "George Soros—and not some cult leader!"

For all the reviewers' reservations, their checks came through as promised. All their reviews, except for Gideon Rosen's, now appear on the institute's Web site, and all eleven reviewers have been paid calls. But they turned up few leads.

Early this April, one reviewer contacted *Lingua Franca,* hoping to interest some "literary sleuths." I was assigned to the story. At one point in my research, the available evidence pointed to suspects as diverse (and as seemingly improbable) as the esteemed Princeton philosopher Mark Johnston, the film actress Sigourney Weaver, and a suspiciously named professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia, Anne Monius. None of those individuals, it turns out, is in any way responsible for the work or financial backing of the A.M. Monius Institute. But I have discovered who is. So here, for the first time, I recount the mad hunt for—and the unmasking of—the mysterious A.M. Monius.

MY INVESTIGATION BEGAN WITH THE little information that the A.M. Monius Institute provided about itself. Dialing the telephone number on the institute's letterhead put me in contact with the institute's voice mail, which I called for several weeks without a reply. In addition, the letterhead listed a bricks-and-mortar address in Pennsylvania. On a map, it appeared to be located at the end of a small road just off Interstate 95, near the New Jersey–Pennsylvania border.

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Perhaps a more fruitful lead, I thought, was the institute's name. Antiquity boasted two Neoplatonist philosophers by the name Ammonius. Ammonius, son of Hermeas, produced commentaries on Aristotle's works, including *On Aristotle's Categories.* Since "Coming to Understanding" discusses Aristotle's Categories at some length, the son of Hermeas seemed a likely candidate for the institute's eponym. As for the other Ammonius—Ammonius Saccas, thought by some to have been the founder of Neoplatonism—he was a figure clouded in mystery, having sworn Plotinus and his other students to secrecy about his teachings. That sounded a bit like A.M. Monius, too. But it was all moot: Of the few scholars who know much about either Ammonius, none had heard of a well-to-do dilettante with a passion for their object of study.

It was time to turn to Netzin Steklis, a woman with a name that seemed designed by God for clean and economical database searches. ("Netzin" is short for "Nenetzin," which means royal doll in Mayan; "Steklis"

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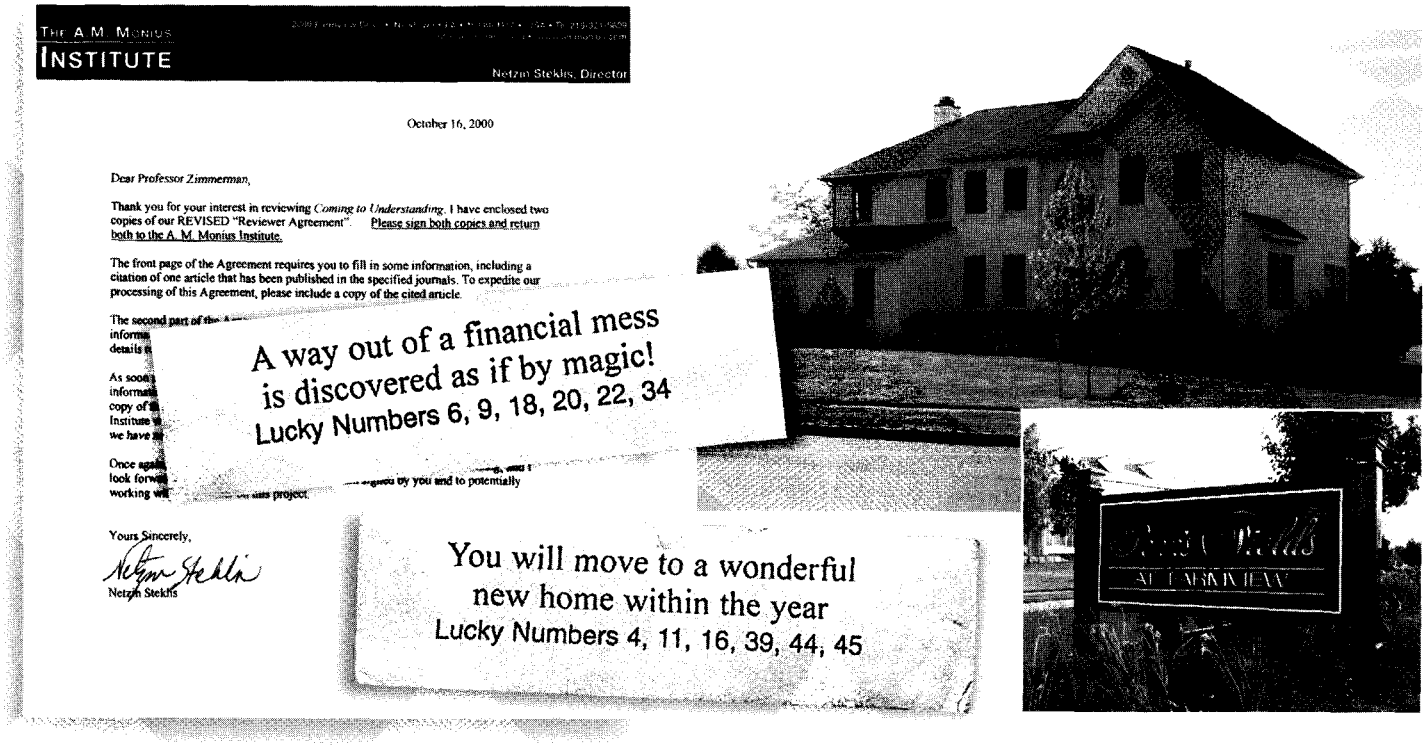
THE A.M. MONIUS
INSTITUTE
Netzin Steklis, Director
October 16, 2000
Dear Professor Zimmerman,
Thank you for your interest in reviewing Coming to Understanding. I have enclosed two copies of our REVISED "Reviewer Agreement". Please sign both copies and return both to the A. M. Monius Institute.
The front page of the Agreement requires you to fill in some information, including a citation of one article that has been published in the specified journals. To expedite our processing of this Agreement, please include a copy of the cited article.
Yours Sincerely,
Netzin Steklis
A way out of a financial mess is discovered as if by magic!
Lucky Numbers 6, 9, 18, 20, 22, 34
You will move to a wonderful new home within the year
Lucky Numbers 4, 11, 16, 39, 44, 45

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A LETTER FROM THE A.M. MONIUS INSTITUTE, SIGNED BY DIRECTOR NETZIN STEKLIS; THE BUILDING THAT OFFICIALLY HOUSES THE INSTITUTE; A SIGN DISPLAYING THE NAME OF THE SUBURBAN SUBDIVISION IN WHICH THE INSTITUTE IS LOCATED; THE TWO FORTUNES THAT DEAN ZIMMERMAN RECEIVED AT A CHINESE RESTAURANT.

is a German name.) Having spoken with Steklis by telephone, most of the reviewers told me that they assumed she was simply an office assistant who carried out the daily chores of running the institute.

The truth was far stranger: Netzin Gerald-Steklis, when not performing grunt work for this enigmatic institute of metaphysics, is the director of the Scientific Information Resource Center for the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International. She is thirty-four years old and married to Horst Dieter Steklis, a distinguished anthropologist at Rutgers University twenty-one years her senior. They live in Arizona with their two children, though they travel often to Rwanda, where they conduct field research as primatologists. The Steklises immediately became suspects, though doubtful ones. Given their intense commitment to gorillas—reported in both *People* magazine and *The New York Times*—neither fit the part of a philosopher manqué musing on the unworldly abstractions of speculative metaphysics. They did not respond to telephone messages I left on their home answering machine.

As far as I could tell, Steklis's only connection to exorbitant wealth was through her affiliation with the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund. The fund's board of trustees included a number of wealthy mavericks (and thus suspects), not least among them the intrepid alien-slaying actress Sigourney Weaver and the multibillionaire software guru Larry Ellison, chairman and CEO of the Oracle Corporation.

The final important piece of information available about the institute was its deed of incorporation, which yielded two names: Joseph H. Hennessy and Marc Sanders. A Web search produced Hennessy's name on a list of members of the Philadelphia Bar Association. By telephone, the bar association identified Hennessy as a partner in the Philadelphia office of the law firm Morgan, Lewis & Bockius.

Hennessy made a strong suspect: In addition to earning undergraduate and law degrees, he had master's and doctorate degrees in political thought from Notre Dame. As a lawyer, Hennessy presumably had some disposable income. (His company profile mentioned neither a wife nor kids.) But would A.M. Monius be that careless, leaving a relatively uncommon and easily traceable name on a public document? I decided to put Hennessy on the top shelf until I had more to go on.

Sanders was another story. He didn't seem to work at Hennessy's firm. But that fact wasn't much help, for his was a fairly common name. Searches on the Web and on Lexis-Nexis produced a list of matches all across the country: a mathematical consultant to a program for gifted youth, a realtor, a legal assistant, a high school basketball coach, an Immigration and Naturalization Service agent, a contributor to a lay journal of Catholic thought called *Eutopia*, and many others. Worse, directory assistance seemed to cough up an "M. Sanders" in just about every town with a plausible connection to the institute. Even if I could identify and confront a potential suspect with that name, would I be prepared to call his bluff if he were to play dumb?

Reaching the end of my factual rope, I turned to a close reading of the manuscript "Coming to Understanding" for possible clues.

"COMING TO UNDERSTANDING" IS A remarkable document. As Ermanno Bencivenga observes in his review, in its sheer temerity the work resembles such philosophical landmarks as René Descartes's *Meditations*, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*. (Bencivenga describes it as "a self-standing piece of reflection which asks to be judged on its own merit.") With few

MICHAEL MURPHY (2)

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citations and nary a footnote, the manuscript seeks to provide "a large-scale account of reality, its origin, purpose, and how it hangs together." The questions it engages are grand: Does reality have a purpose? Why are things intelligible at all?

As a work of metaphysics, "Coming to Understanding" picks up where science leaves off. The purview of science is the world of "contingent beings"—things that might not have existed, or might have been otherwise, such as you, me, electrons, mountains, and the law of gravity. Science strives to explain the nature, properties, and causes of these contingent beings, which as a whole make up our physical reality.

But science does not and cannot explain why there are contingent beings in the first place. That is a question for metaphysics: Why do contingent beings exist? Or, put plainly, why is there something rather than nothing?

"Coming to Understanding" aspires to answer this "antique, impassable" question, but first it must rule out three of its "more familiar competitors": theism, Spinozism, and the Many Worlds hypothesis. All of these positions, A.M. Monius feels, share the same basic flaw: Instead of actually explaining the existence of contingent being, they wind up claiming that contingent being is not really *contingent* but *necessary*. Contingent being, so construed, is "an illusion and so not there to explain at all."

Theism, for instance, originally argued that contingent being is the result of a necessarily existing God who necessarily creates "the world as it actually is." Voilà: the explanation of contingent being. But as Baruch Spinoza pointed out in his *Ethics*, theism thereby shows that contingent being is necessary (for it could not have been otherwise). This conclusion was problematic for theism, which intended to distinguish God from physical reality. Spinoza, on the other hand, was willing to bite the heretical bullet, and he accepted the conclusion that God and nature were equivalent and equally necessary.

"Coming to Understanding" deems such a result unacceptable and declares that a satisfactory metaphysics must figure out a way to explain contingent being without explaining it away by necessitating it. The key, the work argues, is to realize that theists, in attempting to overcome Spinoza's challenge, produced an argument of "the right form" but with "the wrong content."

After Spinoza, theists realized that contingent being could remain contingent (and thus distinct from God) if it had been created to serve some *purpose*. (The fact that a hammer exists for some purpose makes its existence intelligible without making it necessary.) Theism concluded that God's purpose in creating contingent beings was that contingent beings would come to love God, a love that God recognized as a fundamental good. Contingent beings thus exist not *necessarily* but "because they should, i.e., because it is good that they do."

A.M. Monius believes that theism made subtle but important mistakes with this argument, and "Coming to Understanding" presumes to salvage the theistic explanation by correcting for its flaws through a series of intricate arguments. "Coming to Understanding" proposes replacing the theists' God with reality as a whole, or Being. It also advocates replacing God's personal intention (that contingent beings come to love God) with an impersonal, fundamental good (that contingent beings come to understand the form of Being). Having made these substitutions, A.M. Monius reaches the following conclusion: "Contingent being exists for the sake of the coming to understanding of the form of Being Itself by contingent being." In other words, "the central theme of the whole drama of reality" is that beings like you and me and A.M. Monius come to understand the purpose and structure of reality.

And as it happens, the purpose and structure of reality are precisely what A.M. Monius has on offer. In sophisticated detail, the last two-thirds of "Coming to Understanding" are devoted to a discussion of categories similar to Aristotle's, such as the Universal, the Particular, the Spatio-temporal, and the Cognizable. A.M. Monius believes that these categories demarcate the fundamental types of Being and—in light of their interrelations—suggest the purpose of contingent being.

GIVEN THIS GLIMPSE INTO THE MIND OF A.M. Monius, what might an investigator infer about the author? First, consider the ambition and bravado with which A.M. Monius attempts to revamp metaphysics in a mere sixty pages. This is no meek, closeted egghead but rather a poised and confident builder of worlds. "Whoever wrote this," Dancy says with some admiration, "speaks with an authority that you have to earn, normally."

The elusive A.M. Monius intended to keep his or her identity a secret. At one point, the list of possible suspects included the actress Sigourney Weaver, the software guru Larry Ellison, and the philosopher Mark Johnston.

The overarching conclusion of "Coming to Understanding" also betrays a touch of egotism, for the argument is stunningly self-important in its implications: The meaning of life is, in effect, to come to understand the message of "Coming to Understanding." And yet there are signs of self-perspective as well: "Perhaps in this task mistakes will be made," A.M. Monius muses before exposing the structure of Being, "but at least it is the right task."

Many reviewers point out in addition that "Coming to Understanding" bears the telltale marks of an amateur's effort. Though many of the philosophers were genuinely impressed with features of A.M. Monius's argument, they are not under the illusion that it is a great work of philosophy—or even, most reviewers felt, one that meets professional standards.

"It's what you would expect from an intelligent amateur," says Sider, "someone

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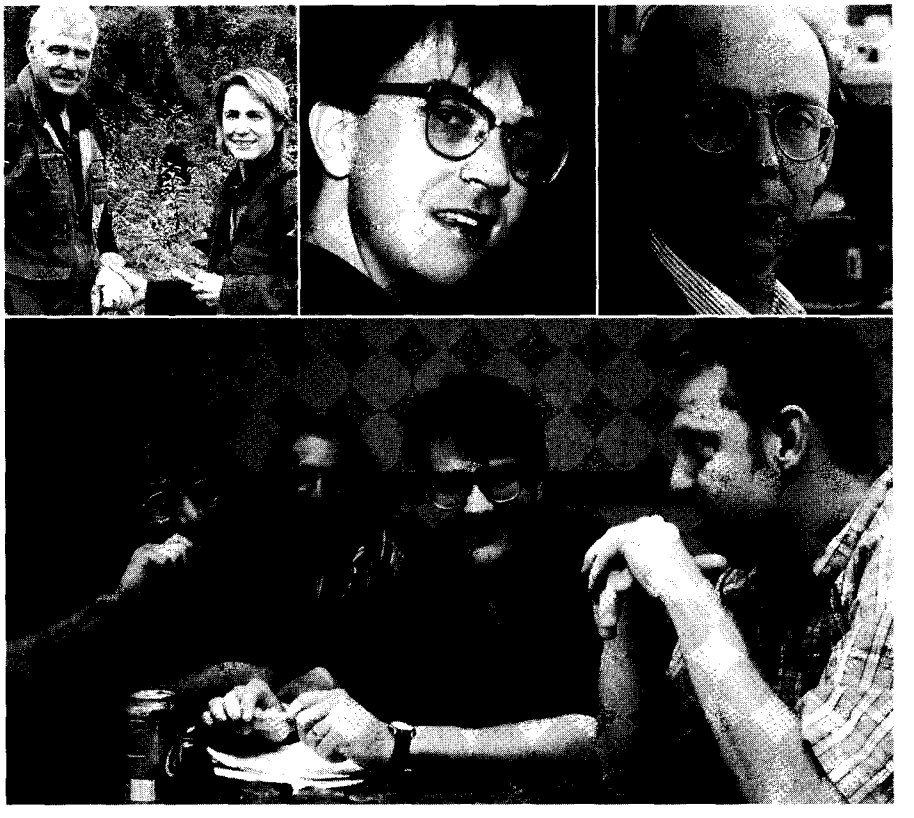
who does not have any training in speculative metaphysics but who is very smart." The argument, he adds, includes "a common pattern of non sequiturs that you get beaten out of you as a graduate student."

Bencivenga complains in his review that there is feeble hand waving at critical junctures in the argument. For instance, the impersonal purpose, or fundamental good, that A.M. Monius believes makes reality intelligible is "just a name for a mystery," Bencivenga explains, "which itself calls for a solution." A major problem that struck Sider was the manuscript's failure to address "the typical, atheistic, materialist response to this sort of argument." Namely, if everything must have an explanation, then everything—including the coming to understanding of Being—must have an explanation. Something is going to have to remain unexplained. So, Sider asks, "why not just be content with the mundane, materialist description of the world, rather than bringing in God or Coming to Understanding or whatever you like?"



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: HORST DIETER AND NETZIN STEKLIS IN THE JUNGLES OF RWANDA; DEAN ZIMMERMAN, FOUNDER OF METAPHYSICAL MAYHEM; PHILOSOPHER JONATHAN DANCY; MAYHEMITES (FROM LEFT) JOHN HAWTHORNE, JAN COVER, TRENTON MERRICKS, AND THEODORE SIDER.

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF LIZ WILLIAMSON AND THE DIAN FOSSEY GORILLA FUND; DOMINIC ZIMMERMAN; UNIVERSITY OF READING; DEAN ZIMMERMAN

DESPITE THEIR CRITICISMS, MOST OF THE academic reviewers were predisposed to appreciate this sort of metaphysical speculation. Many of them first learned of the A.M. Monius Institute from Zimmerman, whom they know from an annual conference he founded called Metaphysical Mayhem (originally Mighty Midwestern Metaphysical Mayhem). "Zimmerman and Sider"—a fellow Mayhemite—"are probably the two best people in the world under the age of forty working primarily in metaphysics," says Ted Warfield.

The Mayhemites differ from their many peers who descend from the antimetaphysical tradition of logical positivism. As Zimmerman explains, the Mayhemites admire philosophers like Princeton's David Lewis and Saul Kripke, Notre Dame's Alvin Plantinga, and the late Roderick Chisholm of Brown University, all of whom helped to revive metaphysics by arguing that a range of traditional philosophical topics—ontology, existence, essence, natural kinds—are in fact central to contemporary philosophical concerns about reference, meaning, necessity, and possibility. Some paper titles from past Mayhems provide a flavor of their arcane interests and humor: "The Varieties of Vagueness (Fewer Than You Think)"; "Impenitent Cartesianism"; and "The Homogeneous Stuff Objection to the Doctrine of Temporal Parts."

Jan Cover, a former mountain climber who speaks in the distinctive accent of the Anabaptist community in which he was raised, describes the Mayhemites as "a bunch of up-and-coming, some people say, 'stars,' who are just hard-nosed, analytic-style, logic-chopping, think-real-hard-and-do-kick-ass-old-fashioned-metaphysics types." Cover's enthusiasm is infectious. In his review of "Coming to Understanding," he claimed that one "would be hard-pressed to locate a richer, deeper contemporary approach to the most fundamental questions of metaphysics." He even went to the trouble of appending a list of typographic corrections—including suggestions for better ways of formatting the indentation of paragraphs.

AS I BECAME INCREASINGLY CONSUMED by the A.M. Monius Institute, I began to think of A.M. Monius in very much the same way that A.M. Monius thought of Being—as something that existed for the purpose of my coming to understand it. With the stakes this high, I felt I needed to bring in some bigger guns. Armed with my impressions of the manuscript as well as my tentative suspect list, I placed a call to the renowned literary detective Donald Foster.

Foster, a professor of English at Vassar College, is perhaps best known for using meticulous textual analysis to expose the journalist Joe Klein as "Anonymous," author of the political roman à clef *Primary Colors*. I sent Foster a copy of "Coming to Understanding" and a set of writing samples from suspects on my list. Foster agreed to see what he could do for me.

Given the limited information that I had provided, Foster was not able to identify the author of "Coming to Understanding." But with some confidence he felt he could rule out a few of my suspects: "Though one can admire Sigourney Weaver's force and form when blasting space aliens," he wrote in a memo, "she's not a writer to take on the logical positivists." As for Larry Ellison? "My

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oracle says 'no way,'" he said. "Same for Horst Dieter Steklis."

Foster suggested I look for a white male who had attended Notre Dame, though again he was merely going on instinct—not offering his professional opinion. "Another possibility," he added, "is that A.M. Monius may be a bright and ambitious, but somewhat shy, Rwandan gorilla."

I CONFESS: WE WERE HAVING SOME FUN at A.M. Monius's expense. And who could blame us? It's not every day that you find yourself scripted into a Thomas Pynchon novel.

Still, all of the philosophers I spoke with made a point of emphasizing how much they admire the spirit behind A.M. Monius's attempt to help revive metaphysics. They applaud his intellectual commitment, not just his financial one. Zimmerman notes that modern philosophers have rarely had patrons in the way that thinkers like Gottfried Leibniz once did. And though it's true that Roderick Chisholm was for a short time supported financially by Dr. Albert C. Barnes, wealthy inventor of the medicine Argyrol, in few such cases does the apparent benefactor also serve, as A.M. Monius does, as the chief philosophical instigator and problem poser.

"Would that there were more nonprofessionals who got jazzed about philosophy!" Zimmerman exclaims. With palpable excitement, he ponders the possibility that the institute might back "slightly broader projects, like a research center"—or better yet, he adds in jest, "support the Mayhem!"

Certainly, there was something right about this conception of A.M. Monius. This was not your stereotypical amateur metaphysician, the kind who stumbles into rarefied speculation about the structure and purpose of the universe as part of a more general descent into paranoia and madness. The institute's philosophy was far too disciplined for that.

And yet there was some evidence—such as the belief that the institute had made a genuine methodological breakthrough in metaphysics—that the author of "Coming to Understanding" might not have a completely realistic outlook. After all the reviews were in, the institute's Web site began promoting a new round of lucrative research grants for the purpose of "directly improving central aspects" of "Coming to Understanding." The advertisement for these grants makes the rather strong boast that the "closest analogy to the upcoming program of the Institute is the widespread collaboration on specific problem-solving found in the bio-medical sciences, along with its pinnacle achievement of the mapping of the human genome."

As one reviewer groaned: "Oh, no—not more money to think about Monius."

THE DISCOVERY OF THE IDENTITY OF A.M. Monius came about much faster—and with much more serendipity—than I had expected. When I spoke with Foster about the text of "Coming to Understanding," he told me of one intriguing clue that he had ferreted out. The term "kindmates," which A.M. Monius uses on page 7 of the manuscript, does not appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. As far as Foster could tell, the term appeared only in essays from the late 1980s by Mark Johnston, chair of the Princeton philosophy department.

Johnston made a poor candidate for the author; he is much too professional a philosopher. But perhaps he had been hired by A.M. Monius as a tutor? Or perhaps A.M. Monius had attended some of Johnston's seminars at Princeton? When I called Johnston, he admitted that he had been using "kindmates" for approximately fifteen years, but he hadn't thought "that it was original with me." He couldn't think of anyone he had taught who might fit the bill. But my suspect profile now included a likely Princeton connection.

Around this time, I finally made contact with Steklis at her home in Arizona. She was extremely courteous and apologized for having to "play this game with you." As expected, she could not divulge much information, though she did deny that her husband or the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund were in any way involved, save for the connection to her. She also informed me that the funding behind the institute was "not drug money."

Having spoken with Steklis, I felt I could call Hennessy without setting off any alarm. Hennessy, too, could not have been kinder or less forthcoming. "You're going to have to tell me why you're talking to me," he explained politely, "because I'm a lawyer and I need to be careful whom I'm talking to because of client confidences." He was willing, however, to deny that he was A.M. Monius.

So I returned to Marc Sanders. Following up on Foster's "kindmates" tip, I checked directory assistance in Princeton, which did in fact produce a listing for a Marc Sanders. Furthermore, a database search on "Marc Sanders" and "Princeton" turned up a red-hot clue. In the "Institutions" listings of the June 1978 issue of *Current Anthropology,* there was a peculiar announcement: "The Institutum Philosophiae Naturalis [IPN], located in Princeton, N.J., has been formed to encourage theoretical and epistemological inquiries in the physical, natural, and social sciences which, because of their unusual scope or method, cannot be adequately supported within the confines of a single scientific discipline or traditional funding source." The IPN owed "its conception and backing to its Executive Director, Marc Sanders, a Princeton-area businessman."

To my ear, the listing read like the promotional materials for the A.M. Monius Institute: Both institutes existed to "encourage" a brand of far-ranging inquiry beyond the traditional boundaries of science; both bore ancient-sounding names; and IPN, like the A.M. Monius Institute, seemed to be able to draw academic heavyweights to its cause. Indeed, IPN's advisory board included some of the most famous names in postwar American intellectual life: the physicist Freeman Dyson, the paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould, the historian of science Thomas Kuhn, and the psychologist B.F. Skinner.

Sanders thus became my primary suspect. Even if he was not the actual author of "Coming to Understanding," I figured, he had to be financially involved. With no success in tracking down a sample of his writing, I decided to call his home in Princeton. When he picked up the telephone, I explained that I was writing an article about the A.M. Monius Institute, that I had already spoken with Steklis and Hennessy, and that I wanted to speak with him as well. He asked if I could call back the next day, and I agreed. An hour later I received an e-mail from him. Assuming that I had already figured him out, he confessed to being A.M. Monius.

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AND THEN, JUST LIKE THAT, IT WAS OVER. But not before Sanders made an appeal to leave his anonymity intact. "Now that you have discovered that I am Ammonius," he wrote, "I know that you will think it your job to inform the world." He had chosen to remain anonymous, he explained, so that his "failure to become a professional philosopher" would not come to light and thus tempt professional philosophers to "simply dismiss the idea of reviewing my work out of hand because the work was known to be by a devoted amateur."

It was a sad note. Having read it, I found that the unveiling of the man behind the great tapestry of the A.M. Monius Institute reminded me of the scene at the end of *The Wizard of Oz* when the dog Toto pulls back the curtain to reveal that the Wizard is actually a small and timid-seeming character, with nothing like the presence of his imposing facade.

But wait one melodramatic second: Wasn't there also something odd about Sanders's plea? After all, the philosophers I had spoken with had assumed from the very beginning that "Coming to Understanding" was the work of an amateur. Not only did the draft itself suggest an amateur's hand, but the whole elaborate production of the institute was a bright, shining neon advertisement for the fact that this was not a professional philosopher working through professional channels.

No, quite obviously it was the *money* that had convinced the reviewers to write their reviews. If anything, the institute's anonymity had only made reviewers reluctant to participate. So I wrote Sanders back, suggesting that if his primary goal was, as he stated, to attract reviewers, then he should rest assured that my article would only broaden the range of philosophers who might be interested in contributing to his project.

His reply was revealing, for his message had changed. He explained that he no longer expected that he could genuinely interest the sort of professional academics who read *Lingua Franca*. Despite his deep admiration for the work of trained philosophers, he had come to form a poor impression of the insular, cliquish culture of their discipline. "I have found professional philosophers to be a proud, demanding bunch who protect their terrain with great contempt for outsiders," he wrote. "My past attempts to publish my work did not get beyond the first contact stage because I had 'no standing in the academy.'"

Even the exciting process of having "Coming to Understanding" reviewed on his institute's Web site had left him somewhat dejected. "Obviously, none of the philosophers who reviewed the work would have done so without the substantial honorarium each was paid," he conceded. But that, on its own, did not concern him: "I look on the sums involved as probably inadequate remuneration for serious philosophical engagement, which I have come to value more than anything else." What actually disappointed him was that many of the philosophers failed to take his work seriously *even after* they had been offered a charitable sum of money to do so. He noted that there were some "intellectually honest people"—he cited Jan Cover as an example—who "really engaged with the work," rather than merely "going through the motions," and thus "made the whole enterprise worthwhile." But by and large, his worst suspicions about the profession had been confirmed. Having said that, he refused to provide me with any further details.

BY CUTTING OFF CONTACT, SANDERS HAD left me with some loose ends. What was his connection to Steklis? How had he made his fortune? How much philosophical education had he had? What kind of organization had the Institutum Philosophiae Naturalis been? I could have pushed harder on these questions, but my deadline was nearing, and my leads had run dry. (Steklis and Hennessy had been forbidden to speak with me further, and the two surviving Institutum board members that I knew of, Dyson and Gould, never responded to my queries.)

Or perhaps it was something else that kept the investigation from pressing on. It was perfectly true that there were enough tantalizing contradictions in what I knew about Marc Sanders to sustain further inquiry. Here was a man who wanted to participate in scholarly debate as just another philosopher but who had managed to participate in so eccentric a fashion that he had made himself unlike any other philosopher before him. He was an independent scholar who resented his professional counterparts enough that he showered them with money. And he sought to join in the postpositivist world of contemporary metaphysics while retaining the mystical ornaments and trappings of the majestic visionaries of past philosophy that the positivists had so effectively mocked. All this was true of Sanders, and genuinely intriguing.

But the mystery of the A.M. Monius Institute had come to seem all too human in the aftermath of having solved it. One began to long for some sense of the enigma again, instead of the dreary realities of worldly motivation, embarrassment, and pride. As Socrates so eloquently reflects in Plato's *Phaedrus*—in a passage close to A.M. Monius's heart: The seeker of pure knowledge is "delighted at last to be seeing what is Real and watching what is True, and so feeds on all this and feels wonderful.... And when one has seen all things as they really are and feasted upon them, one sinks back inside heaven and goes home."

James Ryerson is a senior editor of *LF*. His profile of Richard Rorty appeared in the December 2000/January 2001 issue.

Director Netzin Steklis was no mere office assistant. When not performing grunt work for this enigmatic institute of metaphysics, she was tracking gorillas with her husband Horst Dieter Steklis in the jungles of Africa.

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SETTLING

RICHARD TARUSKIN EXPLORES

LAST OCTOBER, THE UC-BERKELEY musicologist Richard Taruskin addressed an international music symposium at the University of Glasgow. He spoke in the familiar academic idiom, complete with allusions to Tertullian, Jorge Luis Borges, and scholarship in three languages. But for all its genteel erudition, this was hardly a civil lecture. "I see my task as that of defending scholarship against its enemies," Taruskin portentously intoned, "before an audience I must assume to be at least partly hostile." Specifically, he leveled serious accusations at the American Musicological Society, claiming it had "compromised its status as a scholarly organization."

And then the gloves came off. In a ninety-minute harangue that the Glasgow *Herald* found "hugely entertaining," Taruskin mercilessly ridiculed opponents who had associated his views with everything from pro-Sovietism to anti-Semitism. Taruskin, who is Jewish, threatened to refute the latter charge by "drop[ping] my pants in silent protest." (Discretion prevailed.) Anticommunism, he said with a street fighter's bravado, "is one pissing contest I believe I could win." His opponents were "idiotic commentators" who were prepared to believe the most illogical nonsense, like "the possibility that the hall we are sitting in has been surrounded by blue meanies with ray guns who are about to incinerate us all."

It was the kind of performance that has earned Taruskin his reputation as one of the most polemically formidable and publicly influential musicologists in the world today. He was the only academic included in *BBC Music Magazine*'s recent list of the sixty most powerful figures in today's music world. Through his regular contributions to *The New York Times* and *The New Republic,* he has attracted a readership far beyond the reach of most professors. Not all of these readers are fans. On Internet message boards, he is frequently disparaged, sometimes in threads with titles such as "Tired of Mr. T" and "Let's Bash Taruskin."

In addition to his public influence, Taruskin has created a scholarly corpus of breathtaking scope and crushing weight. While working on a comprehensive study of the early music of Igor Stravinsky (in two volumes and eighteen hundred pages), he also managed to transcribe, collate, edit, and annotate an edition of works by the fifteenth-century French composer Antoine Busnoys. He has published several books of his vigorous, sparklingly written essays. And he has contributed 160 articles on Russian composers and their works—close to a quarter million words—to a single reference work, the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*.

Few of his writings have been uncontroversial. In his first brush with notoriety in the 1980s, he challenged the philosophy of the early-music movement, which championed an ideal of "histori-

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BY **PAUL MITCHINSON**

SCORES

THE DARK SIDE OF MUSIC

RICHARD TARUSKIN

cally correct" performance. Such performances, Taruskin wrote in the *Times* in 1990, had "very little" to do with history and everything to do with the "dehumanizing" aesthetic of modernism. The performances' "authenticity," he elaborated, derives from their being "for better or worse a true mirror of late twentieth-century taste."

After the battle spilled over into letters columns, Taruskin became more emphatic in his argument, broadening his examination of the unspoken assumptions of modernism and critiquing what he considered the baleful influence it exerted on composers. He ridiculed the triumphalist rhetoric and cerebral compositions of "academic serialist" composers, associating them with "vulgar" Darwinists, East German spies, and the widow of the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha. Even composers Taruskin admires were not spared his rebukes. His Stravinsky opus was constructed around the argument that the Russian composer was a liar—about his own music. And in his most recent book, *Defining Russia Musically,* he suggests that echoes of fascism give Stravinsky's early ballets an "ominously compelling political allure."

Now Taruskin has decided to take on his biggest, and potentially most controversial, challenge yet: completely rewriting the history of Western music. In March, he finished the first draft of a seventy-five-chapter manuscript, sending it off to his editors at Oxford University Press. The book promises to be a Grand Statement, a sweepingly ambitious attempt to tell the story of music within a larger history of the Western world—economic, social, political, and moral. It's an approach that worries some of his critics. "Richard is an extreme example of the dangers of getting too deeply into the issue of context," says the Yale musicologist Allen Forte. *Dangers?* Pieter van den Toorn, a music professor at UC-Santa Barbara, elaborates: "How long will music be able to survive as something we enjoy precisely because it *doesn't* have these immediate concrete attachments?"

Few music textbooks address issues as large and morally fraught as anti-Semitism, the rise of nationalism, the Holocaust, and the Cold War. None, almost certainly, contains as many words as Taruskin's latest work. It will be "longer than *War and Peace,*" Taruskin promises, smiling wearily, "but *War and Peace* doesn't have as many musical examples."

IF YOU DIDN'T know Richard Taruskin's reputation as a pit bull, you'd swear he was a pussycat. At fifty-six, he sports a helmet of thick salt-and-pepper hair with matching mustache and beard. He favors drab, loose-fitting, occasionally coffee-stained clothing—the unofficial uniform of the rumpled professor.

One Berkeley morning, I sit in on an undergraduate music-history class Taruskin is teaching. Wearing a blazer with a hole in the right elbow, Taruskin prowls around

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the classroom. He lectures without notes, sharing anecdotes, questioning students, and commenting critically on the music he plays for them. Taruskin is dealing with one of his favorite subjects: the "meaning" of music. "Why is it so difficult for music to be *realistic*?" he asks his students. The answer he is looking for—that music, unlike most other arts, has no "stable vocabulary"—is slowly extracted through a process of Socratic questioning. The exchange is lively. Musicologists who have been pummeled into silence by Taruskin's bruising attacks might be surprised to see undergraduates fearlessly challenging him in class. "There's no fixed pitch in nature," Taruskin asserts, provoking a chorus of protests and counterexamples. He finally has to concede that birdsong comes pretty close. He smiles indulgently, perhaps noting inwardly that he'll have to sharpen that aperçu before it shows up in print.

Taruskin loves music's semantic indeterminacy, its capacity for meaning different things to different people. This indeterminacy suggests that listeners will always have as much to say about music's "meaning" as any composer or performer. The greatest villains in Taruskin's books are those who seek to restrict interpretation, stifle the imagination, or coerce listeners into a single way of hearing.

He plays an aria from an opera by Tikhon Khrennikov, the notorious Soviet hack who served as secretary of the Union of Composers for forty-three years. Taruskin marches in time to the music, while a Russian bass, singing the role of a kulak exploiter, worries about Soviet forces coming from Moscow to seize his property. "This is how propaganda works," says Taruskin, still marching along with the music's insistent military pulse. "Through repetition."

Many composers outside the Soviet Union recoiled at the crude propagandistic appeal of such music. Taruskin plays an excerpt from Béla Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, which at one point parodies the famous "invasion theme" from Dmitry Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony. Taruskin thumbs his nose and scrunches up his face as a chorus of mocking brass interrupts the theme. "'War, schmorr! Garbage is garbage,' Bartók seems to be saying," he tells the class. "But it illustrates the essential quandary of the twentieth century," he adds more seriously. "Should an artist's allegiance be to art or to people—or to both?"

The question has haunted Taruskin from his earliest days as a musician. Born in New York City in 1945, he was raised in a musical family—his mother taught piano and his father was an amateur violinist. When Richard started on the cello, the family would play trios together. Liberalism also runs deep in his family's history, a detail Taruskin talks about with pride. When he was eleven, he sported an Adlai Stevenson button months after Stevenson's 1956 election campaign went down to defeat. "Aren't you a little late, son?" asked a puzzled shop owner when he spotted the button on Richard's jacket. "No," he replied defiantly, "I'm three and a half years early!" Taruskin's mother proudly reported the story in a letter to the defeated candidate, and Stevenson wrote back, in a letter that is framed and still hanging in Taruskin's home:

> Dear Richard,
>
> Your mother has written to me that you have not yet conceded! I must say that I admire your tenacity.
>
> I hope that you will always keep your interest in politics.

Taruskin would not disappoint, though music was an unusual route to pursuing this interest. After graduating from New York's High School of Music and Art, he entered Columbia University, where he majored in Russian, with a concentration in music. In 1965, he began attending graduate school at Columbia, studying under Paul Henry Lang, a leading musicologist and author of the classic *Music in Western Civilization*.

One day, when his adviser was handing out research topics, Taruskin was told to investigate the evolution of the modern cello from the viola da gamba, a six-stringed instrument used primarily in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. "It turned out there *was* no such transition," Taruskin says with a laugh. "And I ended up making the opposite transition!" He asked a classmate—a professional gamba player—for some assistance. She demonstrated it and allowed him to play it for himself. Taruskin was hooked. He bought a cheap one to practice on and never looked back.

Throughout graduate school and beyond, Taruskin maintained a double existence as a scholar and a performer. He was appointed assistant professor of music at Columbia straight out of graduate school in 1973. At the same time, he conducted Cappella Nova, a chorus specializing in early music, while also tirelessly researching the late-medieval and Renaissance manuscripts the choir employed. He performed similar scholarly tasks for the Aulos Ensemble, a group of early-music instrumentalists with whom Taruskin played the gamba. He was rewarded for his hard work: In 1978, Cappella Nova won the first Noah Greenberg Award for early-music performance, which paid for the group's first recording. But this life was also exhausting. "As the strain increased," he confesses in an e-mail, "I used to amuse myself (console myself?) with thinking that I was the only musicologist who was accepted as a peer by performers, and the only performer who was accepted [as a peer] among musicologists." It wasn't enough.

In 1986, now with the added responsibility of a family, Taruskin was offered a position in Berkeley's prestigious music department. He accepted, moving there the following year. His performing days were over, but he had found a home.

EL CERRITO is a short drive up the freeway from Berkeley. Taruskin's house, a ramshackle cottage, is hidden from the street by an unruly jumble of overhanging trees. Taruskin works in a shed-like structure next to the house, its floor covered with stacked books, manuscript pages, grass, and leaves.

After an afternoon of coffee and conversation in his kitchen, I ask whether I can hear some of Taruskin's old recordings. He retrieves a few vinyl LPs from a nearby room crammed with shelves of records reaching up to the ceiling. "I haven't listened to these records in years," he says, and the cobwebs around the shelves seem to bear him out. "I'm doing this now with some trepidation."

We begin with a recording of Taruskin playing the viola da gamba in a sonata by Johann Matthias Leffloth (1705–1731). Taruskin hands me the score to follow along. In the slow movement, Leffloth has sketched the faintest outline of a melody for the gamba, and Taruskin dutifully follows the laconic instructions. But when the time comes for the movement to be repeated, the music is transformed. Taruskin begins improvising around the bare structure of

PREVIOUS PAGE: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

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the melody; the viola da gamba throbs with passion at some points, whispers plaintively at others. Taruskin is like a jazz musician reinterpreting one of the old standards. We move on to a mass by Johannes Ockeghem, one of the greatest composers of the fifteenth century. The choir sings robustly and, to my ear, melodramatically. At crucial cadences, it slows down gradually, performing what is known as a ritardando. Taruskin smiles when he hears it. "Yeah, those ritards got me into trouble," he says.

To put it bluntly, Taruskin's ritardandos were out of style. As interest in early-music performance grew throughout the 1980s, a revolution in the aesthetic of performance was also taking place. Taruskin's "communicative" performance philosophy was being replaced by much sterner stuff. "Historical performance was taking over a lot of what had traditionally been mainstream territory," explains John Butt, a lecturer on music at King's College, Cambridge. Christopher Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music issued countless recordings in the 1980s, stressing quick and inflexible tempi (with not a ritardando to be found), literal adherence to the written score, and a cool, unadorned, and "depersonalized" style.

BUT IT WASN'T *just* the ritardandos that got Taruskin into trouble: It was what he had to *say* about them—loudly. In a series of essays in *The New York Times* and elsewhere, Taruskin scrutinized the increasingly ambitious, even moralistic, claims being made on behalf of historical performance. And in so doing, he ignited one of the most heated musical controversies of the past half century.

"I was always very skeptical" about historical-performance claims, says Taruskin. "What was the basis of this idea that we should be so sexless and so inexpressive? Was there evidence in the early-music sources for this? I could never find any." Taruskin's taste and background had helped prod him in this direction. Some of his mentors had performed in the pioneering early-music ensemble New York Pro Musica, under the baton of Noah Greenberg. "They were all very visceral and very communicative types of musicians," he says.

Taruskin gleefully pointed out the inconsistencies and anachronisms of the self-appointed guardians of historical accuracy: strict adherence to metronome markings

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IN THE 1970s, TARUSKIN PLAYED THE VIOLA DA GAMBA IN AN EARLY-MUSIC GROUP.

TARUSKIN GLEEFULLY POINTED OUT THE INCONSISTENCIES AND ANACHRONISMS OF THE SELF-APPOINTED GUARDIANS OF HISTORICAL ACCURACY.

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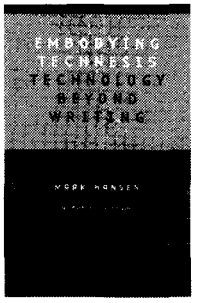

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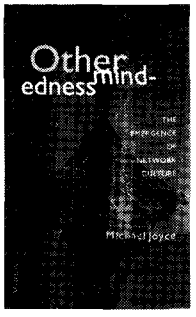

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that were flouted by the very composers who established them, slavish devotion to a written score that Mozart himself would have scorned. Many historical-performance ensembles used countertenors—male falsettos—in their performances of Renaissance and Baroque music. But as Taruskin observed, there was "no evidence that falsettists participated in any of these repertories when they were current."

So why was the music being performed this way? Taruskin argued that the stripped-down, literal-minded, depersonalized sound of much historical performance had little to do with history and everything to do with modernism. John Butt isn't entirely convinced, though he thinks Taruskin "did a great service by bringing up this issue." Butt will reexamine the debate in his forthcoming book, *Playing With History* (Cambridge). "Richard was absolutely correct that historical performance feeds on and could not have happened without modernism," he says. "But there were several other things besides.... As is so often the case with Richard, he'll state something perhaps a bit too boldly and with too much exaggeration, but having done that, he changes our overall consciousness."

One of Taruskin's most surprising conclusions was that a single twentieth-century composer provided a crucial foundation for the movement. Historical performance, Taruskin argued, treated all music "as if it were composed—or at least performed—by Stravinsky."

STRAVINSKY is at the heart of Taruskin's vision of modern music. And on a warm April afternoon, Berkeley's faculty and students file into Wheeler Auditorium to find out why. Taruskin has been invited to give a Faculty Research Lecture, an annual honor bestowed since 1913 on Berkeley's most distinguished faculty members. The talk is called "Stravinsky and Us."

It is a humbling performance. Taruskin throws around terms like "combinatoriality," "ricercar," and "pitch-class set theory" with reckless abandon. At one point, he looks up from his prepared text and gives us a crash course in twelve-tone composition, explaining how a prime form of a tone row differs from its inverted form, its retrograde form, and its retrograde inverted form. After the talk, a couple of gray-haired gentlemen—former Faculty Research Lecturers themselves—exchange pleasantries, consoling each other on how little they were able to follow. "I don't know why he has to do that," Taruskin's colleague Joseph Kerman grumbles to me, shaking his head on the way out the door.

In fact, there is a larger purpose behind Taruskin's peacock-like display of learning. Taruskin has been waging a furious battle with contemporary music theorists—scholars who have attempted to subject musical scores to increasingly abstract, often mathematical analyses. But in order to reject their technique, he has to show that he has mastered it.

Taruskin's central argument is that such analysis tends to extract the sting of genius from the world's greatest—and most morally fraught—works of music. Take Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, the ballet that famously provoked a near riot during its Paris premiere in May 1913. Countless books and articles have tried to unearth a deeper organizing principle behind the work's implacable rhythms and startling dislocations. In *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, Taruskin himself posited a three-note "harmonic cell" as the work's *Grundgestalt*, a view he has more recently self-critiqued. The hidden goal of such analysis is to insulate music from the social reality in which it is embedded, Taruskin now argues. It has a "normalizing and sanitizing" effect, making the music "safe" for listeners and analysts but draining it of its terrifying power. "One can only wonder why such well-behaved music should have evoked protests at its first performance," he writes.

Taruskin suggests that we should still be protesting Stravinsky—at least in our hearts. Early ballets such as the *Rite* "participated in the great stripdown...from humanism to biologism," he argues; its primitivist score "was originally heard (and is still easily heard) as the annihilation of the subject and the denial of psychology.... Rarely has an antihumanist message been so irresistibly communicated." Music theorists try to defuse this threat by reducing the work's "mystifying simplicity" to a "rational complexity," but such an approach exacts its price. "The anxious thrill of moral risk," writes Taruskin of Stravinsky's 1923 choral ballet, *Les Noces*, "is one of the things that has kept it alive, and one of the marks of its creator's fearful potency."

It is odd to hear such convincing musical

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: STRAVINSKY (LEFT) POSING WITH HIS BROTHER GURIY AROUND 1908; STANDING IN PARIS IN THE 1950s; LOOKING AT A SCORE WITH HIS SON SOULIMA (LEFT) IN 1948; CONDUCTING A REHEARSAL IN LONDON, 1965.

ARCHIVE PHOTOS (3)

TARUSKIN CHARGES THAT MUSIC THEORISTS HAVE DEPRIVED STRAVINSKY'S MUSIC OF ITS "ANXIOUS THRILL OF MORAL RISK."

paraphrases from someone who has insisted that "music eludes conclusive paraphrase." Isn't there something "coercive" about such readings? "A lot of reviewers have made that argument," Taruskin acknowledges. But he adds that his claim is just one among many possible claims, and it is not presented dogmatically. "Making a strong, vigorous, even vehement argument, and having better evidence and better rhetorical skills than your opponent—that's not coercion," insists Taruskin. "That's just being successful."

Taruskin devotes the second half of his talk to Stravinsky's 1952 *Cantata*, which is set to words by various English poets. One of the movements, a setting of the fifteenth-century carol "To-morrow shall be my dancing day," shows the aging composer's growing interest in serial composition techniques . Music theorists, for that reason, have subjected the score to intensive analysis, following the lead of Stravinsky himself. But isn't it strange, asks Taruskin, how the greatest minds of music theory have never managed to address the actual text of the piece? "The Jews on me they made great suit, / And with me made great variance, / Because they lov'd darkness rather than light." It is the old libel of Jews as "Christ killers."

Taruskin finds this a perfect illustration of what his editors at *The New Republic* once called "The Dark Side of Modern Music." The point is not that Stravinsky was personally anti-Semitic, although he certainly was. It is that Stravinsky and his modern defenders are *indifferent* to the text or, even worse, believe that respect for a work's "artistic integrity" must always supersede moral qualms. In insisting on such "integrity," we follow the artistic ethic of Stravinsky himself, who preached selfless submission to the composer's wishes. But "how ethical," Taruskin asks his audience, "is an ethic that holds artists and art lovers to be entitled by their artistic commitment to moral indifference, and *the greater the artist, the greater the entitlement*?" And has such a commitment to "abstract" musical worth "got nothing to do with the tremendous decline that the prestige of classical music—and of high art in general—has suffered in our time?"

The moral indifference of artists, Taruskin argues, is potently expressed in the unwillingness of some modern composers to communicate with any audience outside the walls of the academy. The iconic text in this regard was Milton Babbitt's 1958 article "Who Cares If You Listen?" (Babbitt has claimed repeatedly that his editor was responsible for the

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inflammatory title.) The composer should abandon the "public world," Babbitt explains, and turn instead "to one of private performance and electronic media," where the "complete elimination of the public and social aspects of musical composition" might be achieved. In his own compositions, Babbitt extended Arnold Schoenberg's serialization of pitch into other facets of musical quality, including rhythm, timbre, and dynamics. He aimed to create a perfectly integrated musical work, dense with motivic relations.

But there was another, usually unstated, agenda at work as well, Taruskin argues—the Cold War. Difficult music and small audiences became badges of freedom for artists in the West. Babbitt writes that by withdrawing from social engagement, "the composer would be free to pursue a private life of professional achievement, as opposed to a public life of unprofessional compromise and exhibitionism." In the Soviet Union, meanwhile, any step toward musical experimentation risked the dreaded charge of "formalism." Taruskin loathes the polarization. "Either you were totally autonomous or you were under the thumb of Zhdanov," he complains. "So it became hard to move toward a middle ground that recognized an artist's right to free expression but valued social solidarity as well."

Martin Brody, a composer and musicologist at Wellesley College, concedes that Babbitt's musical theory was profoundly shaped by the ideological battles of the 1930s and by Cold War politics. But he is reluctant to endorse Taruskin's blanket condemnation of the purist streak in Western modernism. "I'm not sure that that generalization about the Cold War really makes sense. I do think that the [serialist composers'] rejection of nontheoretical, nonformalist rhetoric got too strong. But it really wasn't empirically that many people."

Taruskin is determined to keep it that way. In a blistering attack in the *Times* a few years ago, he took aim at the composer Donald Martino, a former pupil of Babbitt's who is now professor emeritus at Harvard. The expressive gestures in Martino's music were "primitive and simplistic," Taruskin sneered. "Composers like Mr. Martino are still miseducating their pupils just as he was miseducated himself, dooming them to uselessness." Harvard's faculty were appalled. "To mention the name of Richard Taruskin at Harvard was an absolute party stopper," says one musicologist, who asked to remain anonymous. "People simply froze." Harvard professor Reinhold Brinkmann wrote to Taruskin, telling him that his attack reminded him of German right-wing attacks on Schoenberg during the 1920s. "I don't think that was his intention," says Brinkmann, "but I remember telling him that he was in dangerous waters and that what he was doing was wrong."

Taruskin does have a way of framing his denunciations in extreme, often shocking terms. A typical polemic might take the reader to the very gates of Auschwitz. During the early-music controversy, for instance, Taruskin seized on a metaphor frequently used by historical-performance advocates—that they were like "restorers" of Old Master paintings, scraping away dirt and grime to reveal the original masterpieces in all their glory. But in musical performance, Taruskin

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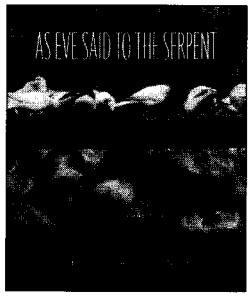

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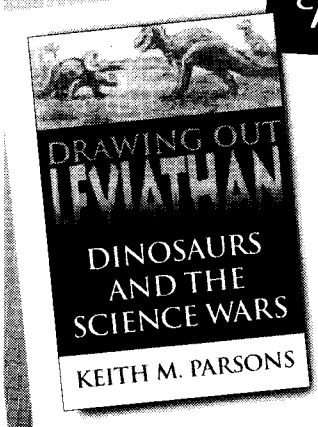

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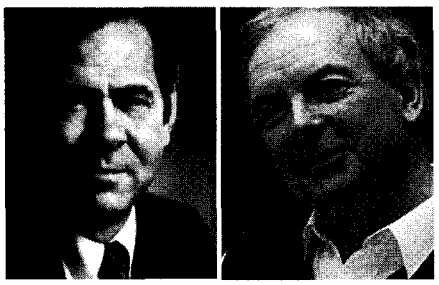
countered, the "dirt" is "what people, acting out of an infinite variety of motives over the years, have done with [the music]." People, in other words, are dirt. Taruskin reminded readers that the "dehumanizing" modernist aesthetic had its dark side, "the side that does evoke robots and concentration camps. We will not forget where Ezra Pound ended up, and why."

Taruskin's colleagues seem cheerfully resigned to such outbursts, and many believe they have benefited from his attacks. "One is only glad to be in a field



DONALD MARTINO (LEFT); CHRISTOPHER HOGWOOD

lunch at a Telegraph Avenue trattoria, he begins with effusive praise for Taruskin. "I think he's one of the very few strong minds in the field," Kerman says. "He so obviously towers above any other musicologist in his generation." But when I ask what effect the tone of Taruskin's polemics has had on his ability to get his case across, Kerman is firm: "I think that it hurts his case, definitely."

Taruskin dismisses such concerns. "That's ridiculous," he snorts, waving his hand in exasperation at the suggestion. "If I didn't do what I do, you wouldn't be here interviewing me now. Why am I so conspicuous? Partly because I'm vehement and partly because I'm right." He rubs his hands together and chuckles.

THE BOX IS three feet long and one foot deep. It is filled with thousands of pages of paper, held together in bunches by elastic bands. It weighs a ton already, and it is just half the book, not including the "musical examples." Taruskin has

DESPITE MISGIVINGS ABOUT TARUSKIN'S CAUSTIC STYLE, JOSEPH KERMAN SAYS THAT TARUSKIN "OBVIOUSLY TOWERS ABOVE ANY MUSICOLOGIST OF HIS GENERATION."

in which polemics are happening," laughs Gary Tomlinson, chair of the music department at the University of Pennsylvania. In his latest book, Taruskin spars with Tomlinson over such issues as hermeneutics, postmodernism, and the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin. After pages of careful argumentation, he ends up comparing Tomlinson's scholarship to "Henry Kissinger's notorious defense of the repression at Tiananmen Square." Tomlinson admits to reservations about the "slightly sneering and hurtful tone that Richard so often adopts in his polemics," but he also adds that it has helped the discipline in general. "It's helped us all define our terms," he says. "It shows us at times the differences that are quite striking among some of us; and it shows us at other times the similarities that we hadn't quite seen."

Joseph Kerman, Taruskin's emeritus colleague at Berkeley, is not so sure. Over allowed me to look over the manuscript for a few days, so I've got my work cut out for me. Where's the nearest photocopy shop?

The book's sheer physical weight is itself an expression of Taruskin's resistance to the idea that music is a "transcendent" art. Most standard narratives of music history pay scant attention to classical music's cultural and political contexts, preferring to tell the story of an art form developing in serene isolation from the outside world. In rejecting this narrative, Taruskin echoes a number of so-called new musicologists, who examine the myriad ways music has reflected and shaped culture. Most notorious, perhaps, is UCLA's Susan McClary, whose researches have led her to identify a "homosexual" style in the modulations and harmony of Franz Schubert's Unfinished Symphony and the "throttling, murderous rage of a rapist incapable of attaining release" in

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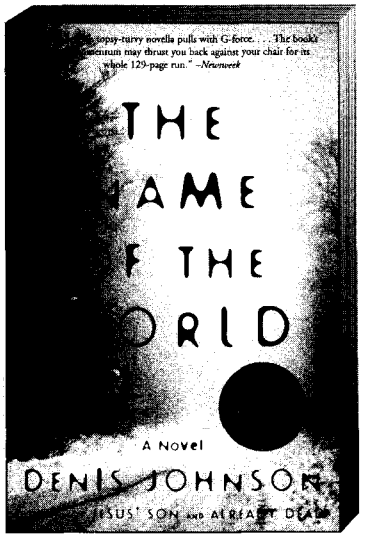

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the recapitulation of Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

But Taruskin's book also challenges much of his field's received wisdom—most notably, the familiar "progress narrative," in which a series of great (mostly German) composers advance the abstract complexity and formal sophistication of music by alternately emulating and rebelling against earlier composers. "Nationalist" (non-German) composers add a little local color to the traditional narrative. Taruskin turns this account completely on its head: In his telling, the great German composers were not simply universal geniuses acting on behalf of all mankind. Rather, he emphasizes the importance of German nationalism to their work and its unfortunate effects for "peripheral" composers such as Tchaikovsky and Dvorák. "Without the native costume," writes Taruskin, "a 'peripheral' composer could never achieve even secondary canonical rank, but with it he could never achieve more."

Taruskin resents the condescension implicit in such narratives. He alludes to the unfortunate fate of the Czech composer Leos Janácek (1854–1928). "Janácek barely gets mentioned" in most textbooks, Taruskin says, "and when he does, it's so often in invidious comparisons, particularly with Bartók." A 1991 history of modern music by the Yale musicologist Robert P. Morgan seems to bear him out. It was "Bartók who came to be viewed as the dominant compositional voice of Eastern Europe during the first half of the century," writes Morgan, partly because Janácek was "considerably less influenced by the 'progressive' elements in twentieth-century music." Taruskin laughs at the description: "Boy, that's really establishing a quota. Only one significant East European, and that will be Bartók, and the others will therefore be secondary to him."

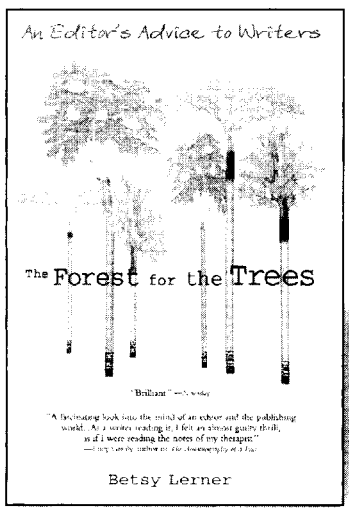
But national chauvinism, Taruskin feels, is just a symptom of a much more serious malady: historicism. "The idea that one is honor-bound to serve the impersonal aims of history," he writes, "has been one of the most powerful motivating forces, and one of the most exigent criteria of value, in the history of music." It has served to obscure the various political agendas being advanced under the placid exterior of art. And in the twentieth century, it has helped advance a cult of the avant-garde, under which the desires of the concertgoing public have been increasingly ignored.

These arguments help explain Taruskin's chapter on Schoenberg, whose "emancipation of dissonance" played such a pivotal role in the music of the previous century. Taruskin's emphasis on the mystical vision behind Schoenberg's theories is unusual enough, but the chapter ends with a discussion of "Schoenberg's most central precept." As the composer wrote in a 1946 essay: "If it is art it is not for everybody: if it is for everybody it is not art." Taruskin asks: "Can such a proposition be defended in a democracy? If not, is there something wrong with art? Or with democracy?"

It's unlikely that any book—even one longer than *War and Peace*—will be able to answer such questions. Just posing them takes chutzpah. But Taruskin believes that the time has never been better for examining the political and moral underpinnings of an art form—"literate" music, as he calls it—whose very basis is being steadily

The Forest for the Trees

AN EDITOR'S ADVICE TO WRITERS ■ BETSY LERNER



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eroded. "I'm writing this book when the end of that tradition can be perceived, for many reasons," he says. "The end of print culture, for instance. There is so much music now that could never be notated but can nevertheless be synthesized and controlled by the composer. So I'm writing in a sense the complete history of the literate tradition in Western music."

Is he pessimistic, then, about the fate of music in the new millennium? "Whatever there's a need for will continue," he responds. "Just like what maintained this useless thing called academic serialism for so long—the Cold War created a need for it, and it continued. Now there doesn't seem to be much of a need for it, and maybe it won't continue, but if there were a need, it would. So I'm not foreseeing the end of anything, I'm foreseeing change."

If change is going to happen, Taruskin is determined to do his part to encourage it. And if the academy significantly advanced the crisis of classical music, as he believes, why can't it help to find a solution? By all accounts, Taruskin has been an enormously important mentor to his students—graduates and undergraduates alike. "You know, one of the greatest pleasures of my job is reading and line editing my students' dissertations," he says, and he seems to mean it.

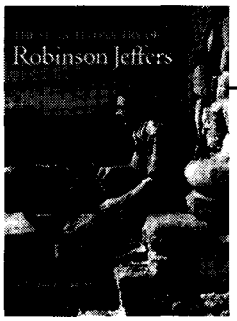
Although he was never one of Taruskin's students, the Princeton musicologist Simon Morrison says he's benefited from Taruskin's critical advice. The Berkeley professor "helped steer me clear of some interpretative culs-de-sac," Morrison remarks. And he finds that his own students almost invariably respond favorably to Taruskin's ideas: "Richard desires to communicate broadly; he avoids esoteric prose and criticizes it in others. In certain respects, it's a verbal reflection of the musical values he espouses, values having to do with music having public meaning and social function."

Such values have led Taruskin to be an outspoken advocate of so-called postmodern composers, who tend to favor a pastiche of styles within a single composition. He singles out the American composer George Rochberg as his "paradigmatic postmodernist," but he has also offered enthusiastic assessments of Steve Reich and the thirty-year-old Thomas Adès as composers willing to be both topical and listener-friendly. No matter how complex Reich's music gets, wrote Taruskin in the *Times*, its patterns "can be grasped by the naked ear and parsed by the rational mind, adding intellectual to physical involvement and banishing the sort of discouraged mental passivity so much new music induces." Rather than reducing listeners "to their cerebral cortex" or their "autonomic nervous system," Reich treats them "as fully conscious, fully sentient human beings."

Ultimately, Taruskin is advancing a moral vision of music in which artist and audience come together on equal terms. And if that means he has to deflate a few artistic pretensions, so be it.

"Let me tell you about composers," he announces to his class. Leaning over and winking conspiratorially, he says in a loud stage whisper: "They're just...plain...folks."

Paul Mitchinson is a writer based in Toronto. His article on concert hall acoustics, "Bouncing Off the Walls," appeared in the April 2001 *LF*.



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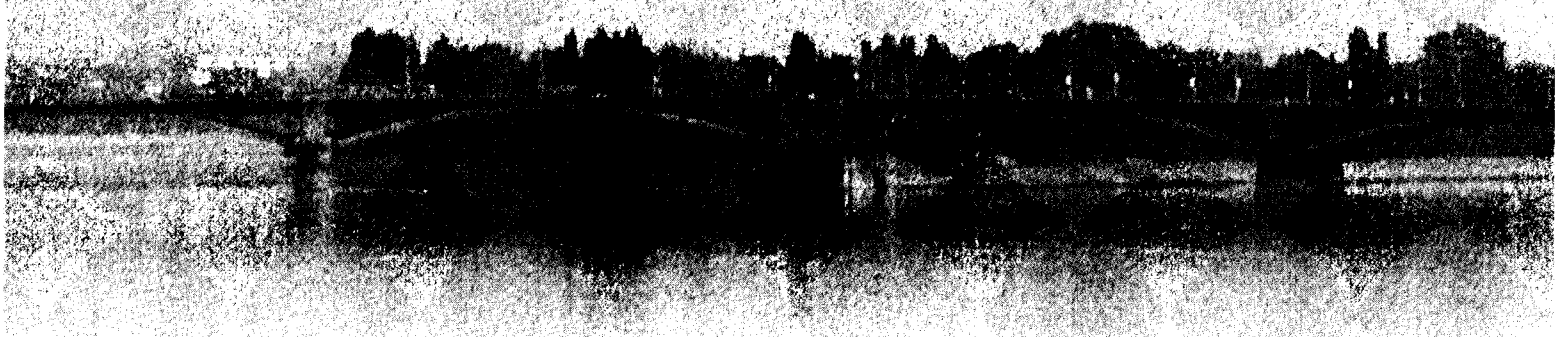

THE JOB MUST CERTAINLY HAVE sounded enticing.

Location: downtown Budapest, a short walk from the Danube in a city whose architecture is rivaled only by its food. Employer: Central European University (CEU), founded by the financier, visionary, and philanthropist George Soros to foster open academic inquiry in the formerly communist world. Colleagues: a distinguished interdisciplinary faculty from all over the world, supplemented by high-profile visiting lecturers—among them Joan Scott, Natalie Zemon Davis, Juliet Mitchell, Peggy Kamuf, and Betty Friedan. Mandate: to shape the future of central and eastern Europe's only graduate program in gender studies.

What scholar of European feminism wouldn't jump at the opportunity?

Susan Zimmermann, a German-born historian, did. Yet by the time she officially assumed the directorship of CEU's Program on Gender and Culture last September, she found herself firmly grasping a hot potato. And not just any hot potato. Judging from the invective pouring in from world-renowned gender scholars—comparing both Zimmermann and the rector who appointed her to Joseph Stalin, threatening action against the university in legal and academic forums, and encouraging students to protest—this was the mother of all hot potatoes on the feminist job circuit.

Why the ruckus? As it turns out, CEU's rector and president, Yehuda Elkana, had unilaterally demoted the program's previous director and fired its only other full-time professor. According to Elkana, these actions were for the long-term good of the program's scholarly profile. But his opponents saw them as a violation of academic freedom and a danger to gender studies in eastern Europe.

Protest movements, boycotts, crackdowns, and threats are common coin in politics. And administrative imbroglios bedevil academia. The combination, Elkana was to discover, can be toxic—even at CEU, which has long located itself at the intersection of politics and academe. Founded in 1991 in cooperation with Václav Havel and the then president of Hungary, Árpád Göncz, CEU normally encapsulates the best of both worlds—the electricity of an activist project, the permanence and gravitas of an institution of higher learning. Its 829 students come from forty countries to study with top scholars on CEU's immaculately restored Budapest campus; its faculty members are paid more than five times Hungary's going rate, but they don't have tenure. It's the perfect expression of Soros's philanthropic vision: generous funding, inspired content, and maximum flexibility. The Hungarian-born billionaire pumps an estimated $350 to $400 million a year into the region of his birth, and of all his projects CEU is undoubtedly the one with the greatest potential longevity. Who would choose to look that gift horse in the mouth?

Meet Joan Scott, the distinguished historian of France from Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study, author of *Gender and the Politics of History,* and one of the most respected names in the American academy. As a visiting scholar at CEU, Scott was dismayed by her experience on the search committee that appointed Zimmermann

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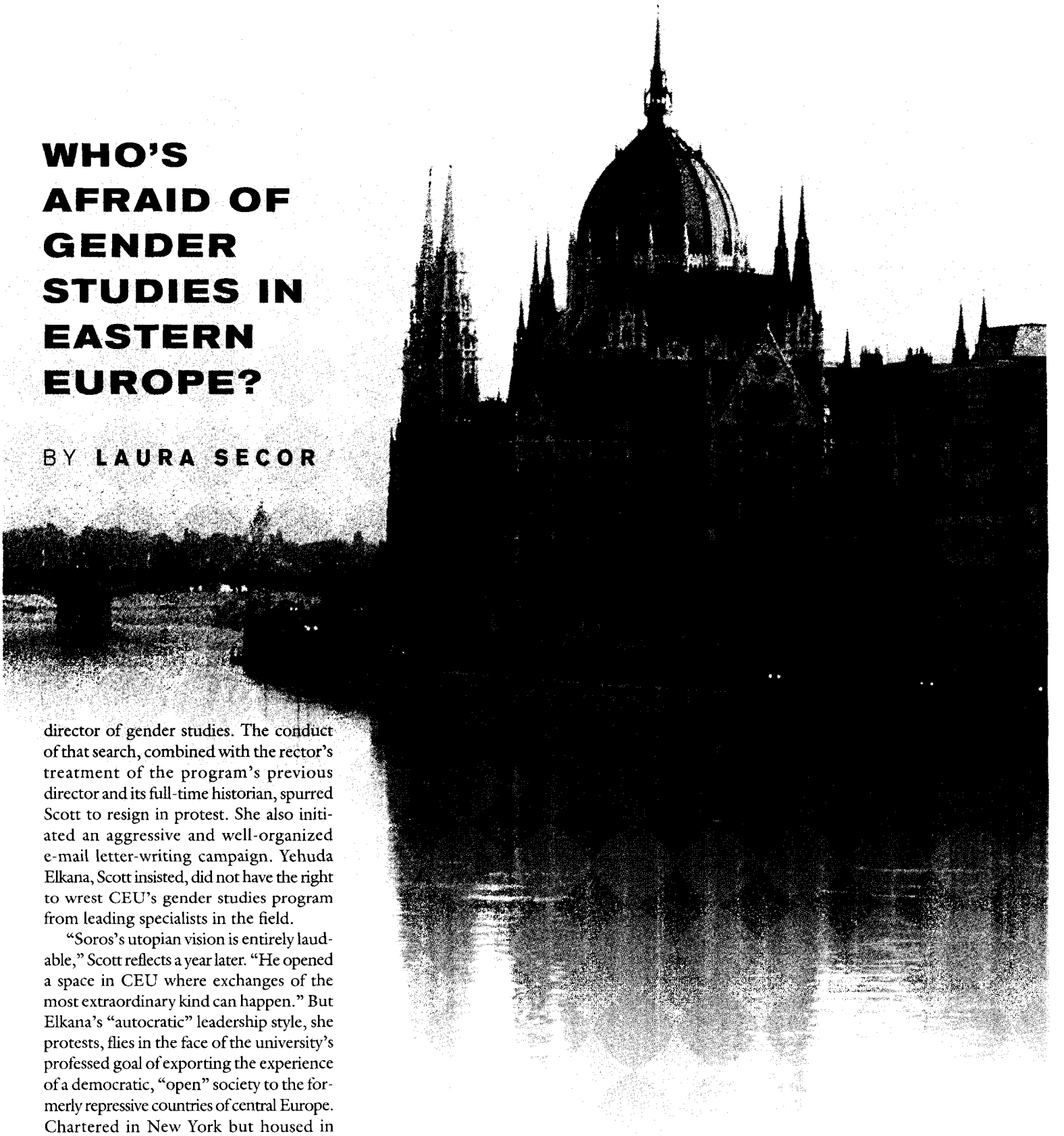
WHO'S AFRAID OF GENDER STUDIES IN EASTERN EUROPE?

BY **LAURA SECOR**



director of gender studies. The conduct of that search, combined with the rector's treatment of the program's previous director and its full-time historian, spurred Scott to resign in protest. She also initiated an aggressive and well-organized e-mail letter-writing campaign. Yehuda Elkana, Scott insisted, did not have the right to wrest CEU's gender studies program from leading specialists in the field.

"Soros's utopian vision is entirely laudable," Scott reflects a year later. "He opened a space in CEU where exchanges of the most extraordinary kind can happen." But Elkana's "autocratic" leadership style, she protests, flies in the face of the university's professed goal of exporting the experience of a democratic, "open" society to the formerly repressive countries of central Europe. Chartered in New York but housed in Budapest and Warsaw, CEU is subject neither to American academic conventions nor to those of Hungary's state institutions. As a result, says Scott, "it's an enormously unstable place. People can be fired on a moment's notice with no recourse." Miglena Nikolchina, the Bulgarian poet

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and Julia Kristeva scholar whom Elkana removed as program director, puts a finer point on this complaint: "You get the same sort of instability in commissar structures. Anybody at any time can be thrown out behind the curtain."

YEHUDA ELKANA is a charismatic and idiosyncratic leader, impatient with checks and balances, firm in his convictions, and quick on his feet. "The force of his personality is huge," one former colleague remarks. "He's a double of Soros—a big guy who talks fast. Five minutes with him is a long time." A Yugoslav Jew who survived Auschwitz as a boy, Elkana spent most of his life in Israel, where he studied physics, mathematics, and the history of science. He became a public figure in Israel's intellectual world as the head of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute; he also directed the Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas at Tel Aviv University.

When he became president and rector in 1999, Elkana hit CEU like a cyclone. He presented the university's trustees with a plan for the "reorganization" of several programs and departments, and he lost no time in executing it, starting with economics and history. He then moved on to the department of environmental sciences. "I simply decided that three professors supervising seventy master's theses is charlatanry," he recalled when I met with him in November. He hired two new professors and halved the department's student population. Some students and faculty protested that Elkana acted alone, consulting experts only informally and neglecting to convene the necessary committees. But whereas the changes to the environmental sciences department outlasted the protests, tampering with gender studies would prove much thornier.

Miglena Nikolchina had been running the Program on Gender and Culture for a year when Elkana became CEU's rector. Her scholarship earned accolades within CEU and internationally. Scott describes Nikolchina's *Meaning and Matricide: Reading Woolf via Kristeva* (University of Sofia Press, 1997) as "dazzling...the best piece of feminist literary criticism I'd seen in years." As director, says Nikolchina, she aimed to build an international community of feminist scholars around her program and to accord theoretical concerns their "proper place." After all, she explains, "central and southeastern Europe have a strong theoretical tradition. It's a part of the world where theory was always an important thing, and from the beginning it was important in gender studies." Within a year and a half, CEU's program had earned its place along the field's cutting edge.

Implementing that vision for the program was not always easy, however. Founded in 1995, the Program on Gender and Culture could grant M.A.'s but not Ph.D.'s, and it was required to make its appointments jointly with other departments or else to hire lecturers on short-term contracts. Nikolchina opted for the latter. Her short-term faculty consisted of a mix of social scientists and theorists, including the Serbian philosopher Branka Arsic, whom Judith Butler has hailed as "arguably the most important Eastern European feminist philosopher to emerge since Julia Kristeva." Butler herself, along with Scott, was among the high-profile Western feminist scholars Nikolchina scheduled for brief visits. The program's students wrote theses on such topics as the self-immolation of Tajik women, domestic violence in Slovakia, and the rhetoric of the Ukrainian women's movement, as well as on literary works by D.H. Lawrence, Fay Weldon, and A.S. Byatt, among others. The number of student applicants to the program increased by about a hundred each year during Nikolchina's directorship. And Nikolchina did make one long-term appointment to her faculty: Andrea Petö had taught in CEU's history department for seven years before Nikolchina offered her an indefinite contract in gender studies in 1999.

Nikolchina had loyal supporters among her faculty. But not everyone was happy. One professor complains that she "rejected the social sciences, ignored them, because she didn't feel competent in social science." (Nikolchina objects that the program actually offered most of its courses in social sciences and history and included only one literary scholar besides herself.) Says another, "She was really influenced by some people and ignored some others. She could not separate her personal relationships from the professional."

Elkana, too, had reservations. It did not escape his attention that Nikolchina had run afoul of the previous rector. (According to Nikolchina, the dispute stemmed from that administration's bid to dissolve the program.) Nor was Elkana pleased with Nikolchina's offer to Petö. But Nikolchina recalls that she did not take the rector's disapproval terribly seriously. When Elkana told her that he did not like Petö's scholarship, she says, "I'd think, it's impossible

GEORGE SOROS FOUNDED CEU IN 1991; YEHUDA ELKANA IS ITS CURRENT RECTOR; JOAN SCOTT PROTESTS ELKANA'S MANAGEMENT STYLE AS "AUTOCRATIC"; SUSAN ZIMMERMANN NOW DIRECTS CEU'S PROGRAM ON GENDER AND CULTURE.

SOROS: BARRY LEWIS/CORBIS; SCOTT: INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY; ZIMMERMAN: GYULA SOPRONYI; PREVIOUS PAGE: BARRY LEWIS/CORBIS

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that everybody likes everybody, but it's not his business to fire people."

Elkana says he planned from the outset to turn Gender and Culture into a full department with a research emphasis. But he could not for the life of him understand exactly what the existing program proposed to research. When he asked Nikolchina, he claims, "I couldn't get an answer out of her. Every time I asked, she told me how awfully difficult it is for women in the world. I said, Look, I don't have to be convinced. I used to be considered a feminist all my life. But this is not a research program, I said. Grievances I know. What is the research program?"

In early March 2000, at Elkana's behest, Nikolchina agreed to hold a workshop at which gender studies would be defined and "researchable problems" delineated. As Joan Scott later wrote, "The group listened respectfully to [Elkana's] repeated demands for 'researchable problems' and then proceeded to demonstrate what he refused to see: that Gender Studies as practiced by these women was always already serious, rigorous scholarship however diverse its methods and theories and however informed it was by feminist concerns with equality and fairness." The scholars at the workshop resolved to retheorize the public/private distinction, the relationship of liberalism to feminism, and the concept of gender. They also called on the program to engage in comparative research on gender-related subjects in different localities.

Still, Elkana was not satisfied. "A research program is, for example, to study scientifically, in economic terms, and to counteract scientifically the arguments many employers make about why they should pay women a lower salary [than men] for the same job," he tells me. "Which is an international scandal of the worst kind. This can be researched, this can be argued, there's lots of work to be done. Just to see them complain about how awful it is is what I call complaints and not a research agenda."

To the assembled gender studies scholars, Elkana's demands seemed insulting and anachronistic. Why didn't he trust experts in gender studies to define their own discipline—and would he treat a male-dominated field with similar high-handedness? Scoffs Andrea Petö, who was perhaps the program's most empirically minded scholar, "And what is objective research at the beginning of the twenty-first century? This is very dubious." Scott concludes: "Miglena and her colleagues are in the process of challenging older forms of knowledge, not producing outcomes that will change policy directly. Elkana perceived that as weak."

AS FAR AS Elkana was concerned, the workshop had confirmed his suspicion that Nikolchina could not or would not build the program that he envisioned. His next step was clear. Within a week, he called Nikolchina to his office and informed her that she would be replaced as director of the program. Later he explained his position in a report to the board of trustees as follows:

> [Nikolchina] had a letter of warning from the [former] Rector.... [S]he did not make any appointments to the Program, could not formulate in a coherent fashion the research orientation of the Program, and was not interested in (or capable of) developing the Program in a direction of concentration on gender issues in the Social Sciences and Humanities as a whole.

At first, Elkana recalls, Nikolchina did not protest her demotion; rather, she gave her consent and agreed to participate in the search for her replacement. According to Péter Krasztev, an anthropologist in the program, Nikolchina was relieved: "She said, Oh, okay, so now I don't have my administrative position, I was not for this anyway, I'll get my same contract with the same money, I will teach, that's great. But in two or three weeks, she changed her mind."

Nikolchina explains that her initial nonchalance merely reflected her belief that it would take a full year for Elkana to carry out all the required procedural steps to demote and replace her. "East European universities succeeded in preserving whatever autonomy they had during communism through observing meticulous democratic procedure," Nikolchina would later write. It was unthinkable to her that the letter of these procedures would not be followed.

It was thus with some surprise, says Nikolchina, that she reported to Elkana's office for a meeting in early May 2000, only to find that he had assembled two potential candidates for her position. One of them was Susan Zimmermann, then a professor in CEU's history department. To Nikolchina, the meeting seemed premature: There had been no formal review of her work and no search announced for a new program director. An opening had been advertised, but it was for a senior professor, and the procedure for appointing senior professors differed from that for program directors.

For the senior professorship, Elkana named a search committee that included two external members, Joan Scott and the Slovene anthropologist Svetlana Slapsak. Both Scott and Slapsak recall that the committee proceeded without their input—meetings, they allege, were scheduled for times when Elkana knew they could not attend. But Elkana insists that when the committee's external members missed a meeting, he followed up with e-mails soliciting their opinions. Even so, replies Slapsak, "My opinion was not respected as a whole or in any of the details."

From early on, Scott, Nikolchina, and Slapsak regarded the search with suspicion. They were especially struck by the fact that Zimmermann had submitted the only application that was clearly intended not just for the advertised senior professorship but also for the position of director. Zimmermann was in fact selected as program director on June 6.

ELKANA INSISTED THAT THE GENDER STUDIES PROGRAM LACKED A RESEARCH FOCUS. IT WAS A SLAP IN THE FACE TO THE SCHOLARS: WEREN'T THEY THE EXPERTS? WHO WAS ELKANA TO DECIDE?

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Nikolchina was still in charge on June 30, however, when Elkana went ahead and fired Andrea Petö from above. Petö's nine years at CEU ended in an afternoon; she was even disconnected from her e-mail and the university's computer network, where she'd stored much of her work in progress. There had been no formal peer review and no warning, according to Petö. Because Petö has filed suit, university officials will not comment on any aspect of her case. But one colleague speculates that her troubles originated in the history department, where some particularly traditional scholars may have objected to her oral-history-based research. When Petö's last contract with the history department had expired, the department had declined to hire her for an appropriate opening in her field. Elkana may have concluded that Petö was a weak scholar to whom Nikolchina shouldn't have offered a full-time position.

Petö was stunned by Elkana's seemingly unilateral decision. When we meet at a trendy, American-style café on the Pest side of the Danube, she punctuates her conversation with a mirthless, sardonic laughter that eventually turns to tears. "I wrote—because of these unfortunate events, I counted—I wrote more than thirty-seven articles in eight different languages," Petö tells me. "But you know, that was not the point. I was not given the opportunity to have a fair review. Neither was Miglena."

THE QUESTION of peer review and democratic procedure was to become a leitmotif in CEU's gender studies conflict. Elkana's reports to the board of trustees emphasized informal consultations with trusted colleagues; Nikolchina and Petö called for investigations, evaluations, committees, and reviews. At an assembly convened to address the situation, Elkana bluntly told the program's students that a university was not a democracy—a statement that upset many observers, given how they understood CEU's mandate as an arm of Soros's Open Society Institute.

"I believe fundamentally that universities are meritocracies and you should advance people according to their quality," Elkana explains in an interview. "And the university has to have somebody who decides.... I'm ready, in politics, to accept the price for being in a democracy. Not in universities. Yes, you have to get in other people's judgment, you have to listen to many people, you have to weigh the other side. But somebody has to make judgments."

To Scott, the upshot was clear. As she would write in a letter to the program's students, "The sad thing is that a university that was supposed to bring democracy and an 'open society' to the region of East/Central Europe is being run by an autocrat who has only contempt for the principles his university is supposed to teach and represent."

In Scott's view, the situation at CEU crossed a line in early July, when Elkana appointed himself acting director of the program until Zimmermann was to take over in September. Scott resigned from the university and, with Slapsak, from the search committee. In her resignation letter to Elkana, which she also sent to CEU's board of trustees, Scott pulled no punches. "Unfortunately, your administration of this university has been a disaster from the start," she wrote. "[I]t is terrible to me that someone with your own history resorts to measures that are typical of the behavior of self-justifying autocrats."

Given Elkana's wartime experience, the possible implications must have infuriated him. To the trustees he wrote that Scott's letter was "bordering on the unacceptable." Another of Scott's letters he described as "written in a style of almost being obscene." In person, Elkana seems bewildered, even hurt, by Scott's stance. Why, he wants to know, did she and her allies never invite him to explain his actions? "Even pro forma," he says, "they could have phoned and said, Well, how did it look from your side, and let's compare it."

Scott laughs when I tell her this. "Personal phone calls are not how I operate," she says. "The fact that he wanted me to do that suggests the extent to which personalized exchanges substitute for procedural regularities at CEU. Once he violated all the procedures, I didn't think he needed to explain why he did that."

In July, Elkana apologized to the university's grievance committee for disconnecting Petö from the computer system. And he convened the interdisciplinary committee that was supposed to have conducted the internal search for the program director. This committee withdrew Zimmermann's appointment due to procedural irregularities but appointed her acting director, in place of Elkana, until the search could be completed. Nikolchina walked out of that meeting and refused to participate in the continuation of the search—a process that would swiftly conclude with the appointment, once again, of Zimmermann, who was the only applicant.

As September approached, Nikolchina and Scott began circulating letters not only to the university administration and trustees but also to students, urging them to protest. During the department's introductory course presentation at the start of the fall semester, Nikolchina indicated that she might not stay to teach her class. It was news to Zimmermann. When the students asked why, Nikolchina detailed her dispute with the rector. It was a move Zimmermann found galling. "What she did to students was more than unfair," she fumed when I met with her a month later. Elkana wrote in his report, "When Professor Nikolchina abused the course presentation session by involving the students in the stories of her grievances, I wrote her a polite letter asking her to stop this, to which she replied in a letter distributed by her to all the students with the usual inaccuracies and false accusations." Perhaps that was the letter one of her colleagues passed on to me, wincing at Nikolchina's inclusion of the following paragraph:

> But there is also the unforgettable story, the comedy of a small parochial, very limited...satrapy implanted by a dilettante, self-designated philosopher-king, an anachronistic encyclopedia survivor who wants to implement amidst the dramas of transitional Central and Eastern Europe his eighteenth-century vision of Grand Knowledge.

ANDREA PETÖ (LEFT); MIGLENA NIKOLCHINA

NIKOLCHINA: UNIVERSITY OF SOFIA

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No love was lost between Nikolchina and Elkana when she announced her resignation on September 29. She compressed her course into a month's time and returned to the University of Sofia, where she is today. "I got an Andrew Mellon Fellowship at the Vienna Institute for Human Sciences and a ten-month fellowship at Princeton," she tells me via e-mail half a year later. "Personally I gained more than I lost through this conflict." But what still bothers her, she says, is "the injustice of what happened."

ELKANA HAD NOT heard the last of the matter when Nikolchina left. Not only was Petö's lawsuit still pending, but a flood of protest letters from an international network of feminist scholars soon deluged the rectorate and the board of trustees. What's more, these letters circulated by e-mail to a vast number of gender scholars.

The heads of women's studies centers in Zagreb, Belgrade, and elsewhere in the region voiced their disappointment and concern. Other letter writers threatened the program with censure, whether at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), or CEU's sister institution, the Open University in London. Judith Butler questioned the replacement of Nikolchina with Zimmermann, writing, "It does strike me as incongruous that the very person whose scholarly work and institutional accomplishments has earned her an international reputation has been replaced by someone who has no such name recognition as far as I can tell." Elizabeth Minnich of the Union Institute wondered why Elkana had taken "the kind of actions one takes only when there are drastic problems." And Oklahoma State University's Arthur Redding concluded his letter with the following words: "It would still be a shame to see the immense promise of CEU scuttled by a conspiracy of fence sitters, power-mongers, mediocrities, and intellectual cowards. Demand better of yourselves."

Nikolchina and Petö filed grievances with the AAUP, a move that could affect CEU's bid for accreditation from the Middle States Association of Colleges and Universities. But given what some faculty describe as CEU's confusing welter of contradictory regulations, the alleged violations may be hard to prove. According to Petö, the letter terminating her contract explained that her courses had been canceled. "The rector had no right, no authorization, to omit the accredited and already advertised courses from the program," she contends. "That is the basis of my law case." Petö has also filed a complaint within the university, where the issue is whether the terms of her contract supersede the faculty compendium in which the university's operating procedures are detailed.

CEU's short-term contracts appear to accord the rector a fairly sweeping prerogative, and Elkana knows it. "It's bad manners not to renew a contract without doing a proper survey," he says simply. When I ask if the international outcry concerns him, he responds in a similar way: "Ah, it would be impolite to say no." Nonetheless, says Elkana, one aspect of the campaign is bothersome: "That many women whom I respect highly as scholars—like Joan Scott herself, despite what she said of me—are now not ready to teach here or come here. Alas, too bad."

The result, for a time, was isolation. Numerous visiting scholars pledged not to return to Budapest. Butler helped bring prize theorist Branka Arsic to SUNY Albany. The faculty that remained found themselves scorned by some former colleagues. "They were not the best that stayed," says Nikolchina flatly. "I don't really have anything to do with them," says Petö. For Péter Krasztev, the destruction of collegial relationships has been a high price to pay for staying at CEU. "I still love Miglena and I love Andrea and I love all those people," he says ruefully. "But of course I do not agree with some of their professional decisions."

The scholars who took part in the boycott felt that Elkana had brought a state of crisis on the program—but to Elkana and Zimmermann, the crisis was the boycott. "For the students," says Zimmermann, "it has had the effect of making them insecure, as it was announced all the time that the program is dying." Her voice rises slightly when she talks about Scott's lobby. "The campaign interprets itself as including everybody who is in favor of human justice in gender studies. That's not true," she insists. "It's a distorted view where the camp involved with the campaign becomes so huge and the world of gender studies becomes so small."

IT COULD NOT have been easy to assume control of a gender studies program that had so polarized its constituency. Zimmermann, proud and uncompromising, did not exactly have a healing touch. What's more, she agreed with the rector about the need for reorganization. "Independent from having some good scholarship and some very good scholars here, the program was lacking purpose," says Zimmermann.

PETÖ AND NIKOLCHINA HAVE FILED GRIEVANCES THAT COULD AFFECT CEU'S BID FOR ACCREDITATION.

The author of three monographs, including *The Better Half? Women's Movements and Women's Endeavors in Hungary Under the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848–1918*, and countless journal articles on poverty and social policy, Zimmermann had proposed to refocus the program's research. She felt that the field needed to develop a more truly global framework in order better to integrate gender studies scholarship from "peripheral" and "semi-peripheral" countries. It sounded reasonable—though not strikingly more "researchable" than the proposals offered at the March workshop.

Despite the protests, Zimmermann managed to host a lecture series that included speakers from Croatia, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, as well as Germany, India, England, and Norway. A surprising number of scholars wrote to her, she told me, expressing their support for the program and pledging to come teach as soon as the events of 2000 were forgotten. But the students I spoke with were glum; they had

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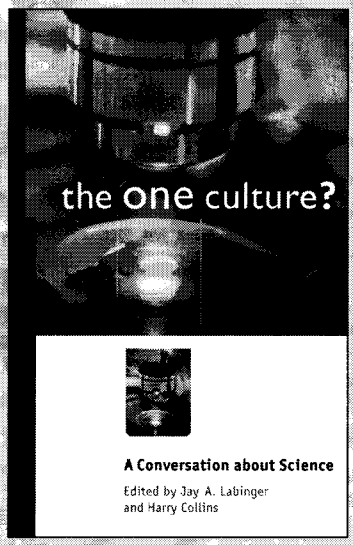

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come to Budapest to study with Arsic and Nikolchina, who were now gone. With those departures, many of the program's courses in theory had evaporated.

Some faculty I spoke with distrusted Zimmermann and found her management style abrasive. They complained that she was rigid and remote, communicating little with them or with the students. An ugly anti-German sentiment sometimes accompanied these remarks: One professor described Zimmermann as "authoritarian" and "colonial, very colonial, German." Ironically, some of the same scholars rejected Zimmermann on account of her leftist politics, saying that her emphasis on class was off-putting to scholars from the former communist bloc. Explains Nikolchina: "She's leftist in a way which gives us the creeps here."

Zimmermann did not attempt to extend an olive branch. Rather, she returned tit for tat in a notorious correspondence with Joan Scott. In an August 1, 2000, letter, she wrote: "The current campaign is a textbook example of power play, which is global only in its self-proposed name, but in reality dominated by influential tenured female professors mainly in the US and a few more 'Western' countries.... This results in a boycott of the unfolding of a Program in Gender Studies in Central Eastern Europe...." Quoting from a letter in which SUNY Buffalo's Elizabeth Grosz called on Zimmermann to resign and informed her that she would find herself unable to hire visiting scholars to the program, Zimmermann retorted, "*So soll es sein*—to blackmail and harassment I won't give in. If there is something like 'feminist mainstream postmodern essentialism' disregarding the minimum standards of professional and political ethics, the current campaign represents such worldview and action at its best/worst."

CEU, noted Zimmermann, is still a work in progress: It's a "young, heavily under-institutionalized university," she wrote, and the ambiguities in its regulations allow the campaigners to pursue their own interests by alleging procedural violations. But were they really protesting the procedure, or the outcome? "The campaigners do no good for any of the involved women," she concluded, "and they are engaged not in argumentation and democracy but in demagogy. *They do not know what they are doing* to gender studies."

Scott's reply was brief and pointed. Zimmerman's letter, she remarked, could as easily have been written by Elkana himself. But Scott was especially taken aback by one implication: "Why do you assume that a Western feminist conspiracy is at work here for bad ends?" she demanded. "What interest would we have in harming a 'fledgling program'? Has it not occurred to you that there might be massive injustice at work...? And that I am protesting injustice? Why, I wonder, are you unable to perceive the issues in those terms?"

Scott's extended response to Zimmermann's letter was to come in another forum. At a feminist research conference in Bologna, Italy, at the end of September, Scott gave a complex and thickly argued paper on the happenings at CEU—specifically, she addressed the letter she'd received from Susan Zimmermann. "That [Zimmermann] is a westerner, that the protagonists in the struggle—the two fired women and the rector—are 'easterners,' that complaints have come from West and East, are irrelevant to her," wrote Scott. "In reaching for political terms that will be recognizable to those she wants to rally to her side... Zimmermann chooses clichés associated with political/regional nationalism (and also, unfortunately, with Stalinist polemics)."

That Zimmermann accused her of "feminist mainstream postmodern essentialism" proved especially rich fodder for Scott's analysis. Scott interprets the accusation as "Zimmermann's attempt to protect 'eastern' Gender Studies from a structuralism and post-structuralism that she designates as 'western.'" In Scott's view, this effort puts Zimmermann "on the side of 'feminist mainstream essentialism'—a dominant current in the West that has declared 'postmodernism' to be antithetical to feminism—and it pits her against at least one very powerful 'eastern' philosophical tradition—the linguistic/structuralist tradition associated with the defeat of many communist regimes in the region."

"I am not primitive," Zimmermann replies when I ask her if she believes post-structuralism to be a Western imposition on eastern Europe. To Scott her response was short, acid—and in Hungarian. "Tisztelt Prof. Scott," she wrote. "Tulajdonképpen értjük-mi egymást?"

"Well," it translates, with heavy sarcasm implied. "Do we understand each other?"

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THE EXCHANGE between Scott and Zimmermann was, no doubt, the best theater to emerge from what Elkana dubbed "*l'affaire* gender." But the real conflict plays out on a larger stage. Scott and her allies have, after all, bitten the hand that feeds gender studies all across the formerly communist world. Was their campaign an act of courageous independence—or of misguided intimidation? It depends whom you ask.

George Soros is the foremost benefactor of eastern Europe's libraries, literary journals, humanitarian projects, Internet development programs, Roma rights campaigns, health-care projects, arts programs, scholarships, research grants, and scholarly exchanges, among other things. His Open Society Institute (OSI) also funds gender studies programs or centers in numerous countries. After a mere ten years, it is hard to imagine eastern Europe without OSI. Kim Lane Scheppele, a former director of CEU's gender studies program, has speculated that "the influence of the Soros Network exceeds the influence of all bilateral efforts of states outside working with states inside the former Soviet region."

Nikolchina worries that Western foundations, including OSI, have come to loom *too* large over the region's public life. Eastern European intellectuals and civil society leaders, she points out, risk brokering away the freedom to set their own priorities. It's an important point. But Nikolchina strikes it with considerable hyperbole: In an e-mail to me, she compares George Soros to Stalin—unfavorably. "Stalin," she wrote, "hypothetically could be replaced, while Soros's power (his money) is protected by the larger structure of Western democracy."

Scheppele's critique of OSI is a bit more measured. The institute's projects, including CEU, were designed to absorb the shocks of rapid political transitions. Accordingly, as Scheppele describes them, they are adaptable, expandable, and collapsible. This very plasticity allowed the university to accommodate an influx of professors fired from the University of Belgrade in 1998. "They left Belgrade for political reasons. And at that point, CEU was the only institution in that part of Europe that wanted to take care of them," recalls Branka Arsic, who came to CEU around that time. "I was hired without a committee," she reflects. Who disputed the procedural informality then?

CEU'S BUDAPEST CAMPUS MUST SEEM LIKE A "PALACE" TO STUDENTS FROM RURAL AREAS, PÉTER KRASZTEV REFLECTS.

And yet, as in the corporate and nonprofit worlds, the downside of flexibility can be instability. Argues Scheppele, "There is no security of expectation in anything within the [OSI] network. Things change suddenly, without warning, and everyone simply has to adjust." For a university, it's a fairly novel way of operating. As Arsic notes, at CEU "they don't give tenure, so people cannot feel safe and free. They are thinking of an academic institution as a place for eternal competition and uncertainty. It's not a very academic logic." Academia, after all, is supposed to furnish a haven for free inquiry. And institutions of any kind offer safety and comfort precisely because they are impersonal, inflexible, and predictable. CEU, says Arsic, "is an institution that escapes the logic of institution."

CEU is not a predictable place—and at least for now, the boycott of its gender studies program doesn't seem to have had the predicted effect. This March, Elkana approved a budget increase that will allow the program to make several new hires. Zimmermann has filled one senior position, and she is in the process of hiring one or two junior faculty. The history department now offers a joint Ph.D. with gender studies. Nonetheless, as Zimmermann acknowledged by phone in May 2001, "There are always tensions and conflicts in the scholarly community." As she noted in a recent report to her higher-ups, the OSI Women's Network Program, which includes a number of women's studies programs across the region, "seems to have withdrawn silently from any form of cooperation" with the program. So have some of its former contacts in the West. As long as Elkana is rector, Scott says, she cannot in good conscience urge anyone to cooperate with CEU.

For Elkana, meanwhile, the battle has entered a new phase. To promote gender studies to full departmental status, he observes, "I have to fight inside to convince people to accept it. Because as we very well know, gender studies is not the most popular university department."

Laura Secor is a senior editor of *LF*. Her article "Sofia's Choice" appeared in the March 2001 issue.

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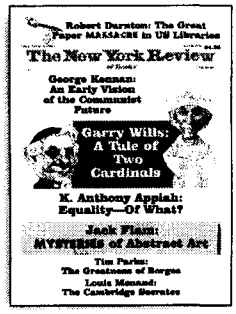

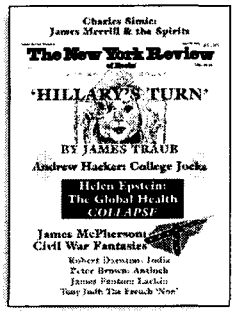

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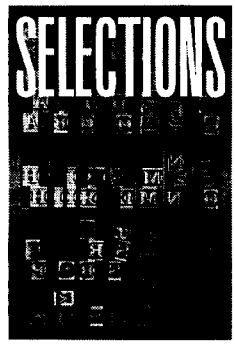

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PASSIONS OF A PRUSSIAN

A NEW BIOGRAPHY BREATHES LIFE BACK INTO KANT

BY **JONATHAN RÉE**

KANT: A BIOGRAPHY • BY MANFRED KUEHN • CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS • 2001

THE YOUNG IMMANUEL KANT, AS WE learn from Manfred Kuehn's excellent new biography, intended to pursue a career in medicine. In the end, of course, he had to settle for philosophy, but he managed to reconcile himself to his fate. Indeed, he came to regard philosophy as the noblest of vocations, describing it in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as the ultimate guardian of "the essential ends of human reason." Natural scientists might be highly skilled artisans of knowledge, but philosophers were nothing less than "teachers in the ideal" and "legislators of human reason."

Kant was confident that his *Critique* would eventually be recognized as starting a new epoch not only in philosophy but also in the progress of universal human enlightenment. He claimed the honor of having compiled the first "complete inventory of all the fundamental concepts that constitute pure knowledge" and was sure that future generations would be able to build on his achievement and settle all the internecine squabbles in which reason is "set at variance with itself." There was "not a single metaphysical problem," he thought, that could not be sorted out with the help of his new "transcendental philosophy."

These assertions may sound like the bombast of a conceited and inexperienced young man. But when the *Critique* was first published—in May 1781—Kant was already fifty-seven years old. He was safely established as a professor of logic and metaphysics at Königsberg, on Prussia's Baltic coast, a respected member of the university senate, and a sometime dean of the philosophical faculty. He had been lecturing dutifully to large cohorts of students for more than twenty-five years without a break, and the experience no doubt helped him imagine the incredulity that his self-confidence might provoke. "I can fancy that I detect in the face of the reader," he said, "an expression of indignation, mingled with contempt, at pretensions so arrogant and vainglorious."

But he protested that his philosophy was "incomparably more moderate" than all its rivals. His basic principle was, after all, that knowledge can never reach beyond the limits of possible experience, and his ideal philosopher was a timid doubter rather than a magnificent magus. Kant himself refused to make any personal claims on the public, adopting a phrase from Francis Bacon as his motto: *De nobis ipsis silemus*—"About ourselves we remain silent."

Within ten years, Kant's self-denying philosophical revolution was renowned throughout Germany, and soon, with the help of rumors and primers and a few fragmentary translations, it had a reputation in the rest of Europe and America as well. Its detractors might have outnumbered its devotees, but even the harshest critics acknowledged that it had irrevocably altered the rules of the philosophical game: Whether they liked it or not, there could be no return to the pre-Kantian age.

The young Thomas De Quincey, for example, became fascinated by Kant around the turn of the century, several years before his fateful encounters with Wordsworth, Coleridge, and opium. When a boy, he had fallen for a romantic idea of Germany as an intellectual paradise, sheltered by a mighty tree of knowledge called "the new or transcendental philosophy of Immanuel

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Kant." He hastened to teach himself German, and in or around 1804 he launched himself into the *Critique of Pure Reason*. But the experiment was not a success: "Six weeks' study," he recalled in his autobiography, "was sufficient to close my hopes in that quarter for ever." He was thirsting for a "new and creative philosophy," but all he found in Kant was a melancholy and envious "philosophy of destruction." Reading the *Critique* had been both a "profound shock" and a "perfect disappointment." Kant had proved to be an archenemy of the imagination and "a disenchanter the most profound."

Many years later, De Quincey wrote an influential essay titled "The Last Days of Immanuel Kant," presenting it as a tribute to a life "remarkable not so much for its incidents as for the purity and philosophical dignity of its daily tenour." He lifted all his material from a memoir by Ehregott Wasianski, who had been a loyal friend to the philosopher from 1790 until Kant's death, just short of his eightieth birthday, in 1804. But Kant had begun to lose his capacity for sustained intellectual work in 1789, at the age of sixty-five, and Wasianski's biography is a portrait of the philosopher not as a vigorous and imaginative thinker but as an old man doing his best to avoid the indignities of gradual mental decline. Kant had always been a dapper dresser, for instance, and Wasianski gave a hilarious but affectionate account of the system of concealed springs and cords with which he tried to prevent his silk stockings from crumpling around his spindly shins. Wasianski also noted his "very dexterous mode of nesting and enswathing himself in the bedclothes." De Quincey (who was famously clumsy and unkempt) repeated all these anecdotes, improving them with a few mocking cadenzas of his own and even suggesting that opium would have been "a perfect remedy" for Kant's physical ailments. In De Quincey's hands Kant becomes a specimen of fatuous professorial unworldliness, and the ostensible eulogy turns into a stealthy act of revenge.

A few years later, Heinrich Heine gave the screw a further contemptuous turn. "It is difficult," he wrote in his *History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany,* "to recount the life-history of Immanuel Kant, since he had neither a life nor a history." Stranded in a sleepy old town far away in the northeastern corner of Germany, Kant had always led the abstract, mechanical existence of a fussy old bachelor. "The great cathedral clock of Königsberg cannot have performed its daily labors with less passion or more regularity than its compatriot Immanuel Kant," Heine continued. "...Everything had to be done at its appointed time, and whenever he stepped forth from his front door, wearing a grey frock-coat and sporting his gold-topped Spanish cane, his neighbors would know that it was exactly half past three."

But Kant was no harmless old eccentric, according to Heine. With his "world-smashing thoughts" and his prodigious "talent for suspicion," he was the philosophical equivalent of Robespierre: a ruthless intellectual terrorist, "cutting, dry and anti-poetic." Robespierre and Kant were perfect examples of *Spiessbürgertum,* or shopkeeperish philistinism. "Nature had designed them to spend their lives measuring out parcels of coffee and sugar, but fate decreed that they should have other things to measure, placing a King on the scales of the one and a God on the scales of the other," Heine wrote. "...But the good people of Königsberg never guessed the truth: to them, Kant was just a philosophy professor, and when he walked by they would just greet him politely and adjust their watches."

These portraits offer us an almost irresistible invitation to congratulate ourselves on not being Immanuel Kant, and they have been a gift to every anti-Kantian from Friedrich Nietzsche and Bertrand Russell to Gilles Deleuze. The image of Kant's daily existence as dominated by petty routine makes it easy to presume that his writings, too, were crippled by a forlorn and loveless intellectualism. And his well-known attempts to base morality on individual duty rather than on cheerful sociability, or to capture the natural order within a closed framework of a priori concepts, only seem to confirm that he was, in Elias Canetti's words, "a head without a world."

Of course, it has always been possible to fight past these prejudices and sample Kant's vast and variegated literary output (twenty-nine volumes in the Academy edition). In the three decades leading up to the *Critique of Pure Reason,* he published an impressive array of essays and treatises on cosmology, physical geography, and theoretical physics, as well as theology and moral theory. He also brought out the skittish "Dreams of a Spirit-Seer" in 1766, satirically recommending the use of "academic tone" as a means of excusing "both author and reader from the duty of thinking." But the "precritical" output is negligible compared with Kant's authorship after 1781. The first *Critique* was supplemented by two more (one on practical reason, the other on judgment), together with polemics and responses, a series of popular essays on the nature of social and intellectual progress, and a short but risky book called *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone.*

FOR THE FIRST THIRTY YEARS OF KANT'S CAREER, MOST OF HIS FRIENDS REGARDED HIM AS AN UNDISCIPLINED DILETTANTE.

Despite the evidence of his writings, myths about the dull aridity of Kant's life have continued to flourish unchecked. Philosophers in general have never been very attractive subjects for biographers, and Kant has always been among the more uninviting. There have been no more than half a dozen comprehensive studies of his life, and even the best of these—such as Ernst Cassirer's, first published in 1918—have concentrated on summarizing his thoughts rather than on setting the record straight about his character and conduct. Manfred Kuehn's new book, with its scrupulous combination of archival accuracy and philosophical sensitivity, therefore sets an entirely new standard, opening up fresh approaches not only to Kant's life but also to the meaning of his work.

AFTER READING Kuehn's descriptions of young Manelchen's poor home, his dreary schooling, the death of his sweet mother when he was thirteen and of his father a few years later, no one can

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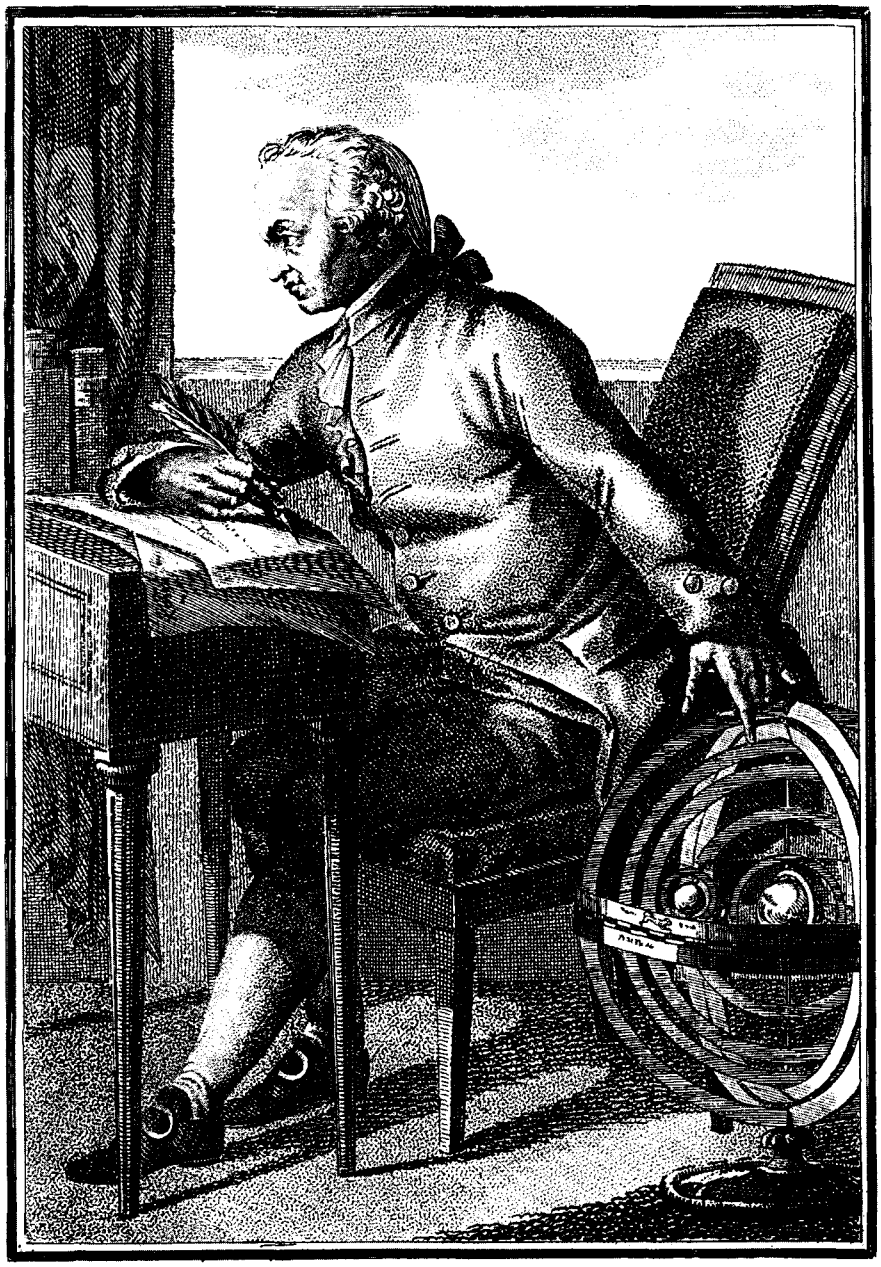
go on supposing that he was unacquainted with hardship or grief. Nor can anyone be excused for treating eighteenth-century Königsberg as a sleepy little town cut off from the rest of Europe: It was a political capital, a busy international port, and the home of one of Prussia's largest universities. And Kuehn's investigation of the philosophical faculty reveals that all of its leading members were more or less in touch with the cosmopolitan movement of radical enlightenment. Kant may have been brought up as a Pietist Christian and a Prussian, but the University of Königsberg transformed him into a fully accredited participant in the same vigorous intellectual world as Pope, Voltaire, Hume, Diderot, and Rousseau.

Of course, he did not take the risk of living an outwardly interesting life. He never had much money, and there were no great journeys or friendships with famous people, no magnificent quarrels, and no sexual adventures—indeed no sex at all, as far as anyone can tell. Kant's indifference to Christian dogma was open but not flamboyant, and after abandoning his medical ambitions and failing in some early attempts to become an independent author, he was forced by financial necessity to submit to the repetitive routines of university teaching. He did not like it much, but he stuck to it for more than forty years without a break: It was not until 1796, when he was seventy-two, that he became too feeble to continue and was at last permitted to retire.

The job was never a sinecure. When he started out as a private lecturer, Kant had to teach several courses each semester, lecturing more than twenty hours a week for thirty-six weeks a year. He lived off student fees, supplementing his modest income by offering disputation classes and various forms of private tutoring. Moreover, he had to cover the entire humanities curriculum, including theoretical physics, physical geography, ethics, politics, metaphysics, and logic, not to mention "philosophical encyclopedia, with a short history of philosophy." He found the work tiresome but gained a reputation as a good performer. Johann Gottfried von Herder, who attended Kant's lectures assiduously for three years in the 1760s, found that they were "like an entertaining conversation" conducted with graceful elegance, pronounced in a pleasing voice, and displaying a remarkable talent for whimsical comedy.



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Kant had to wait fifteen years before being appointed to a professorship, but the promotion made little difference to his teaching load and even required him to give public lectures at seven in the morning, which took some getting used to. He was now obliged to cover topics prescribed by the minister in Berlin—including "practical pedagogy" and, briefly, mineralogy—but he also developed a popular new course in "anthropology," which surveyed the phenomena of commerce, morality, education, and politics from a historical and political point of view, bringing in masses of incidental details drawn from histories, travel books, and his favorite English novelists. In addition, he had to take his turn as university rector and dean of faculty, though his friend the comic writer Theodor Hippel remarked that despite his prodigious memory for scientific texts and even lists of student names, he was easily defeated by simple administrative problems.

Kant did not have a house of his own until the end of his life, so he always ate out with friends, keeping up with local and international politics and taking a passionate interest in his food and wine. (Hippel said he half expected him to come up with a *Critique of the Art of Cooking*.) He also frequently attended plays and concerts, though Kuehn is unable to tell us what he saw.

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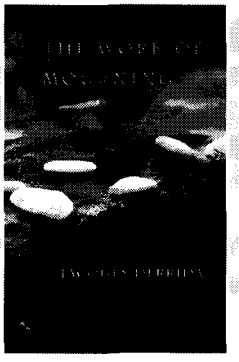

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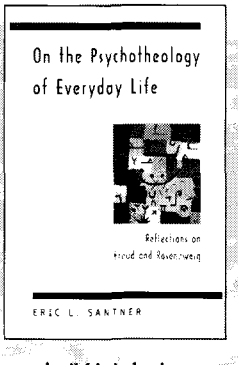

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Apart from inns, restaurants, and theaters, Kant's social life centered increasingly on the household of Joseph Green, a British merchant and a leading figure in the cosmopolitan business community of Königsberg. Green had a taste for enlightened ideas, and Kant probably discussed every line of the *Critique of Pure Reason* with him during the ten long years he spent writing it. Green was generous and hospitable but also fanatically punctual, and Hippel was to satirize him as the "man of the clock"—a reputation that eventually rubbed off, fatefully but without much justification, on his philosophical friend.

IT IS NOT until more than halfway through the book that Kuehn reaches the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Some readers will feel that they are now entering familiar territory, and a few may yawn at the prospect of yet another investigation into the question that has kept the Kant industry busy for that past thirty years: Whether the *Critique* succeeds in saving human knowledge from the corrosive effects of skepticism about the external world. But after accompanying Kuehn along the paths that led up to Kant's masterpiece, we are likely to look at the *Critique* rather differently and perhaps to find it even more impressive than before. It is good to be reminded that for the first thirty years of Kant's career, most of his friends and colleagues regarded him as an undisciplined dilettante whose work would never amount to much. On one occasion he would be refining Newtonian physics and cosmology, on another advocating Rousseau's child-centered approach to education or worrying over Hume's attitude toward the primacy of practical belief over theoretical knowledge; or else he might be exploring anthropological evidence of the progress of civilization, arguing about the discontinuity between sensory and conceptual knowledge, or disputing biblical accounts of history and morality or the traditional proofs of the existence of God. It was not until the *Critique* at last appeared that all these issues were revealed as aspects of one and the same problem, though Kant himself worried at it for half a lifetime before working out what it was.

The central problem, as Kant eventually understood it, was the status of pure reason. The problem obviously involved the abstract and ahistorical question of whether rea-

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soning, unaided by experience, could ever give rise to knowledge; but it also raised more concrete cultural questions concerning the value of the grand tradition of metaphysics—the tradition that harks back to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle and supposedly furnishes us with descriptions of supersensible entities like God, goodness, and the soul. European universities had always treated metaphysics as the pinnacle of secular knowledge, but in the eighteenth century it had been elbowed aside both by natural science and by forms of Christianity based on piety and conscience rather than theology and dogma. "There was a time when metaphysics was entitled Queen of all the sciences," Kant wrote in the preface to the *Critique*; "but the changed fashion of our time now brings her only scorn; the respectable old lady is spurned and forsaken, and bewails her fate like Hecuba: There was a time when I ruled supreme...but I am now banished, powerless." Kant's problem was whether, in spite of everything, metaphysics might still have a future.

Kuehn's able summary of the arguments of the *Critique* restores the question of metaphysics to center stage, where Kant intended it to be, and his biographical narrative reminds us that for Kant the issue was not only intellectually intriguing but also personally poignant. He had, after all, decided to devote his working life to providing philosophical instruction to the young. But he had felt the force of Rousseau's hostility to the artificial education that damages the natural goodness of ordinary humanity, and he had been swayed by Hume's doubts about philosophy as such and about reasoning in general. Thus the question of metaphysics precipitated a prolonged crisis of professional faith. How could he continue with his career once he had become convinced that the traditional claims of philosophy were little short of fraudulent and that the principles of knowledge and virtue, such as they were, were not the trade monopoly of philosophers but part of everyone's basic mental equipment?

Kant solved the problem through a kind of ironic negativism. The metaphysical tradition was demonstrably deluded, no doubt; but its errors were not adventitious: They were endemic to human nature. We should continue to study the "mystical idealism" of the past—no longer in the hope of nourishing our souls with the nectar of metaphysical truth, but simply in order to discover the sources within ourselves of the dangerous sophisms by which we are always liable to be deceived. One theme of the lectures that Herder attended in the 1760s, for example, was that even if moral philosophy can never positively teach us to be good, it may nevertheless prevent us "from doing anything that would be worse." Or, as Kant put it much later, philosophy cannot explain the ultimate ground of morality, but it can perform the even more vital task of helping us to "comprehend its incomprehensibility." The vocation of the philosophical teacher, Kant thought, was simply to remind us of our intellectual limitations.

KANT WAS PASSIONATE ABOUT FOOD AND WINE; ONE FRIEND EXPECTED HIM TO COME UP WITH A CRITIQUE OF THE ART OF COOKING.

When a reviewer described the *Critique* as a form of "higher idealism," Kant objected vociferously: "High towers and metaphysically tall men are not for me; nor are the many winds that blow around them." "My own place," he added, "lies in the fertile bathos of experience." And, in a letter quoted by Kuehn, he confessed his own susceptibility to misology—to a "sullen mood" of resentful spite toward the claims of reason. His baffled sentiments arose, as he gallantly put it, not from loving philosophy too little but from loving it too much.

ANYONE who has read the *Critique of Pure Reason* from beginning to end will be aware that it has a sharply differentiated dramatic structure. It is like a play in three acts, the first establishing the basic premises of the action, the other two tracing out its consequences, both funny and sad. In Act 1, we see hordes of unruly bodily impressions being gathered up by the mind and molded into unified and intelligible experiences. Even Kant's greatest admirers

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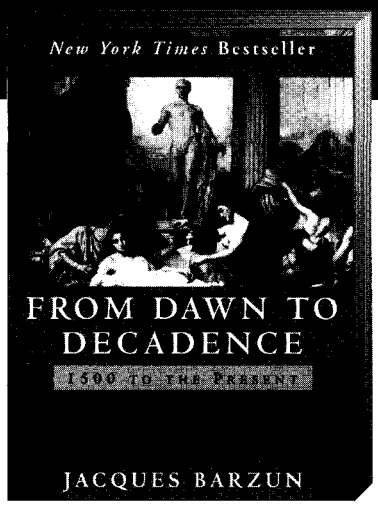

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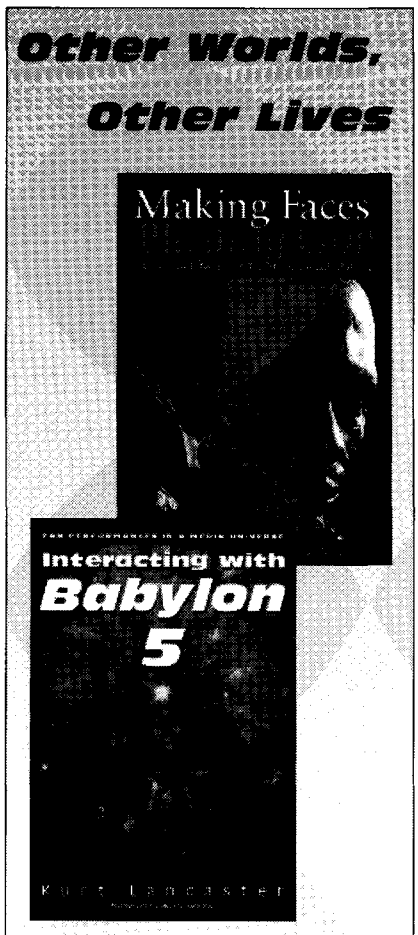

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would have to admit that his handling of the two forms of sensibility (space and time) and the twelve categories of understanding is long-winded and repetitious. Despite an outlandish interlude (the "schematism") in which each of the categories—from Unity and Reality to Causation and Necessity—comes forward and tries to pass itself off as a specific way of experiencing time, the first act sags dreadfully, and it is not surprising that many readers check out before the end.

But it is folly not to stay for the rest of the show. The second act ("Transcendental Dialectic") is comparatively light—a comedy in which reason, trying to break away from the world of spatiotemporal objects, constructs for itself an alluring collection of pure ideas, in particular the soul, the cosmos, and God. But instead of recognizing them as figments of its own creativity, it attributes a bogus objectivity to them and so falls headlong into a series of self-made traps. In the third act ("The Doctrine of Method") the mood becomes a little somber, as pure reason is forced to face up to the sad truth about itself. It has been exposed to the world and to itself as a wily trickster, and its masterworks—the high metaphysical doctrines of God, freedom, and immortality—have turned out to be systematically flawed. But at the same time it has become clear that we could never break free from them even if we wanted to: "We shall always return to metaphysics," Kant says, "as to a loved one with whom we have had a quarrel."

The *Critique* is thus a kind of tragedy, whose hero blunders into a situation he does not understand, succumbs to his own extravagant follies, and ends up sadder and perhaps a little wiser. But it is a modern tragedy rather than an ancient one. A classic tragic hero would have attained sudden enlightenment and then died, but pure reason is still there when the final curtain falls, as large as life and as dangerously attractive as ever. All we can do is scale down our hopes of intellectual perfection and learn to treat philosophy as a form of self-discipline—a "negative instruction," as Kant calls it, whose task is curb the illusions of a reason that forgets its limits.

Kant had quietly abandoned his youthful dream of becoming a medical doctor, but he returned to his interest in health and disease in one of his last essays, written when he was distractedly clinging to the last frayed threads of his intelligence. His argument was that the true task of modern medicine should be the promotion of general habits of healthy eating and regular exercise, rather than the invention of specific remedies for individual diseases. Instead of entertaining itself with fanciful dreams of absolute cures, it should settle for taking sensible precautions and keeping illnesses under control. The future of medicine, in short, lay down much the same path as the future of philosophy.

The parallel was not lost on Kant's contemporaries. One of the most influential of his early disciples, for instance, was a medical doctor named Anton Willich, who moved away from Königsberg in the 1790s to become a fashionable practitioner in London and Edinburgh. Willich wrote several good books, in very passable English, some advocating a Kantian "revolution in philosophy," others a new approach to health based on well-regulated diet, active exercise (especially swimming), and constant vigilance. "Formerly, people were not accustomed to think of the physical state of their body until it began to be afflicted with pain or debility," Willich wrote, "in which case, they entrusted it to the practitioner in Physic, as we deliver a time-piece to a watchmaker." But with the progress of civilization, everyone had now become "his own physician," and as a consequence, "we seldom are able to tell, whether we are healthy or diseased."

As with the body, so with the mind: After Kant, we would all have to become our own philosophers, constantly striving to prevent ourselves from becoming victims of our own intellectual delusions. In his article on medicine, Kant had cited the maxim of ancient Stoicism: *Sustine et abstine,* or "Put up and give up" as it might be translated. Kuehn's fine and rather touching biography reveals a philosophical life lived with pathos, courage, and good humor, as well as a terrible and merciless intelligence. Kant knew that no one could stop dreaming of perfection—least of all himself. But he realized that we should try to give up believing in it and start learning to live within our finite intellectual resources.

Jonathan Rée teaches philosophy at Middlesex University, London. He is the author, most recently, of *I See a Voice: Deafness, Language, and the Senses* (Metropolitan).

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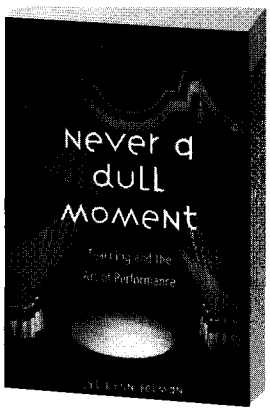

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continued from page 5

tional tradition that is much older than Puerto Rican nationalism and derives from the labor movement. When the students registered their grievance on the blackboard in the professor's classroom, they referenced not a nationalist concept but one from the international labor movement: *rompe huelga* ("scab" or "strikebreaker"). Strikers around the world defend their picket lines against strikebreakers in this way.

The student strike was a response to the federal arrests of 242 people who were peacefully protesting the U.S. Navy's presence on the Puerto Rican island Vieques. The navy has used the island for target practice for sixty years and has also utilized depleted uranium and napalm just a few miles from the civilian part of the island, which has ten thousand residents. Cancer rates in Vieques are 27 percent higher than in the rest of Puerto Rico. It is not surprising, then, that the movement to rid Vieques of the U.S. Navy enjoys broad majority support in Puerto Rico, independent of status preference. Pro-statehood, pro-commonwealth, and pro-independence political parties all support the call for the navy to withdraw.

The confrontation in Sotomayor's classroom thus was not between narrow, provincial nationalism and a broader notion of struggle for democratic rights through statehood, as Mooney's article implies, but between a collective social movement and the individual wish of a professor to hold an exam that day.

CÉSAR AYALA
Department of Latin American and Puerto Rican Studies
Lehman College
City University of New York

MYTH QUOTATION

A tiny pedantic point regarding "Hurricane Hugo" by David L. Kirp [April]. Kirp reports that Robert M. Hutchins created the "animating myth" of the University of Chicago when, while its president, he boasted: "This is not just a very good university. It is the best university in the world." That is a slight but telling misquotation. Pioneering publicist of higher education that he was, Hutchins was certainly known to indulge in puffery. But more typically he wielded understatement, wit, and irony to win attention and make a point. That style marked Hutchins's actual phrasing in this instance, fashioning a subtler and more beguiling myth. Here is the actual quote, as it appeared in *Time*'s November 21, 1949, cover story on Hutchins: "It is not a very good university. It is simply the best there is."

JAMES SLOAN ALLEN
New York, NY

CORRECTION

In "The Voucher Vortex" [May/June], *Lingua Franca* reported that William Howell shared "raw data" from his research with Martin Carnoy. In fact, Howell did not share raw data. He did share an unpublished table showing preliminary estimates of the effects on African Americans' test scores of switching from a public to a private school.

BOOK NEWS

We are pleased to note the appearance of a new book by *Lingua Franca* contributing writer Caleb Crain. *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation* has just been published by Yale University Press.

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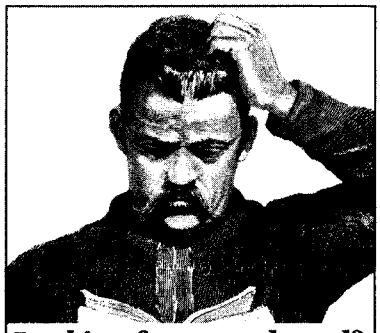

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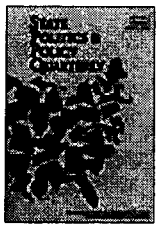

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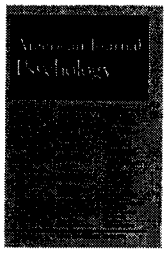

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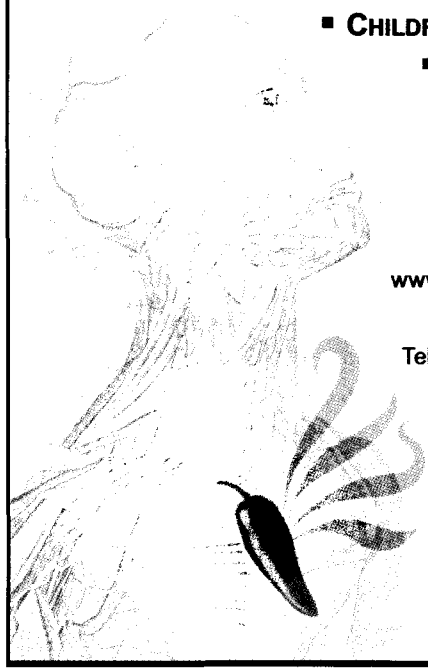

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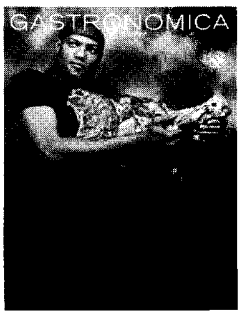

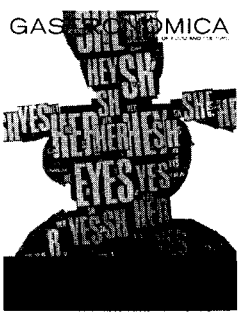

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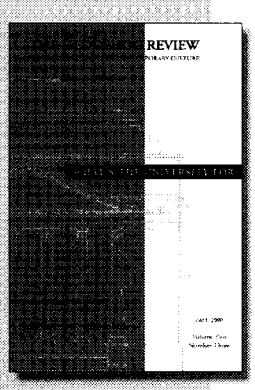

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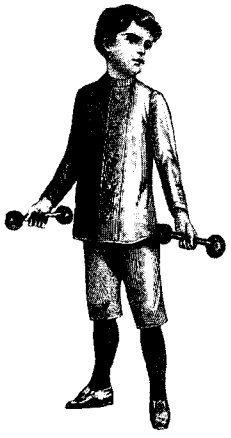
SONS AND LOVERS

A NEO-DARWINIAN THEORY OF THE LEISURE CLASS



PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH has fathered two children, both of them daughters. Former president Bill Clinton has fathered a single child, also a daughter. That makes the forty-second and forty-third commanders in chief somewhat anomalous by historical standards. Of the 150 children sired by previous U.S. presidents, 90 were male and only 60 female. That's three boys for every two girls. Now, this could be a statistical fluke, like flipping a coin 150 times and getting 90 or more heads. But such an outcome is observed very rarely, less than 1 percent of the time—unless, of course, the coin is biased.

American presidents are not the only elite group to produce markedly more sons than daughters; the same goes for European aristocracies and royal families. (Ditto, in the animal kingdom, for socially dominant Peruvian spider monkeys and well-fed opossums.) For oppressed groups, the situation is just the opposite: In racist societies, the subject races tend to have slightly more daughters than sons.

Biologists of a neo-Darwinian bent have a theory to explain all this. *Homo sapiens,* for most of its evolutionary history, has been a polygamous species. If you are a high-ranking member of such a species, your son is likely to attract many female mates and thus furnish you with far more grandchildren than a daughter. If you are lowly, though, then your son may fail to win any mates at all, whereas your daughter can at least get your genes into the next generation by joining a harem. (Even in monogamous societies, a poor son is often forced to remain single, but a poor daughter might marry a rich man.)

Let's suppose for a moment that this neo-Darwinian story is true. What sort of biological mechanism could be behind the sex-ratio bias? Each potential father, after all, produces as many X sperm as Y sperm; if the former unites with the mother's egg, a girl is conceived; if the latter, a boy. Given these basics of human reproduction, it would seem that any significant deviation from a 1:1 sex ratio could be ascribed only to pure chance. How, then, could your reproductive apparatus ever respond to an environmental variable, such as where you stand in the social hierarchy?

Consider a curious phenomenon known as the "returning soldier effect." During and just after major wars, mothers in the warring nations give birth to substantially more sons than daughters. One is tempted to see this in teleological terms, as though nature were trying to make up for the men lost on the battlefield. That, of course, is nonsense: The extra baby boys can't very well mate with war widows. So what is happening here? One hypothesis, developed by the English biologist William H. James, attributes the skewed sex ratio to hormones. During wartime, women adopt more dominant, "masculine" roles—Rosie the Riveter, that sort of thing—and this may well tip their hormonal balance. These hormones, it is further conjectured, affect the relative success of the X and Y sperm in getting to the egg.

The key here could be the fact that the male-engendering Y sperm carry a little less DNA—and are thus slightly more agile—than their female-engendering X counterparts. The hormones might work by thickening the mucus in the cervix, making it easier for a Y sperm to swim toward its goal. Male hormones may also play a role in some as-yet-ill-understood way. Circumstantial evidence suggests that men with high testosterone levels are more likely to sire sons than daughters, which might explain the presidential record if you subscribe to the alpha-male model of leadership.

Theories of sex determination have been around for ages, often yielding quack advice for parents who yearn for offspring of one sex over the other. Both Aristotle and the Talmud recommended placing the conjugal bed on a north-south axis to conceive a boy. Another ancient notion was that male seed issued from the right testicle, female seed from the left; so, if you wanted to father a boy, you might tie a string tightly around your left testicle prior to sex, or even have it amputated altogether, as some French aristocrats did.

Today there are more reliable ways of exercising control over the sex of one's children. In the United States, a number of sex-selection clinics have opened over the past few years. By using a laser machine that can separate Y sperm from X sperm, these clinics can guarantee with fairly high probability that a couple will conceive a child of the desired sex. And in the great majority of cases—more than two in three—the desired sex is female. "Women are the driving force, and women want daughters," the inventor of one sex-selection method explained to *The New York Times Magazine.* Since these clients tend to be affluent and presumably of high status, their preference for girls does not match the predictions of evolutionary psychology.

Let me close with a little puzzle having to do with sex selection. Suppose that the Joneses are planning to have two children and that the first child turns out to be a boy. What is the chance that the Joneses will end up with two boys? It is one-half, because that is the chance the second born will also be a boy. Now look at the set of all families with two children. Choose at random a family where at least one of the children is a boy. What is the chance that the other child will also be a boy? Now the answer is only one-third. Why the bias for girls?

JIM HOLT

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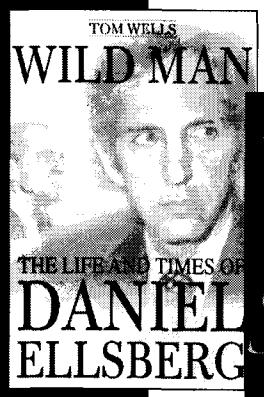

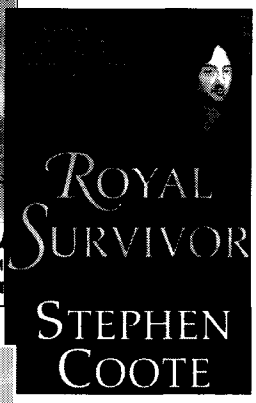

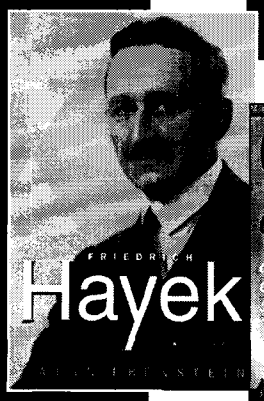

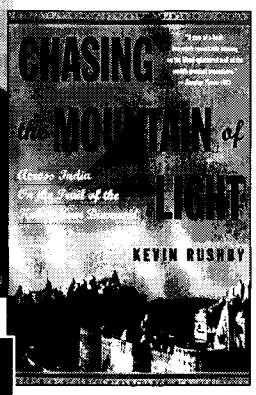

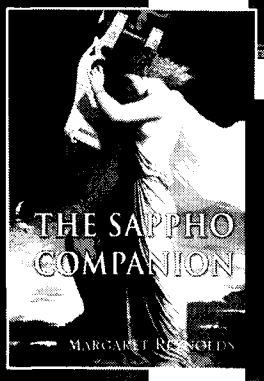

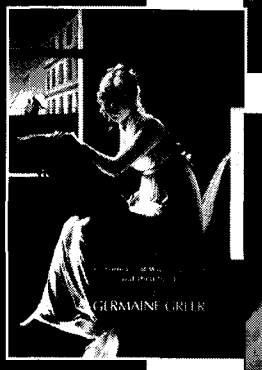

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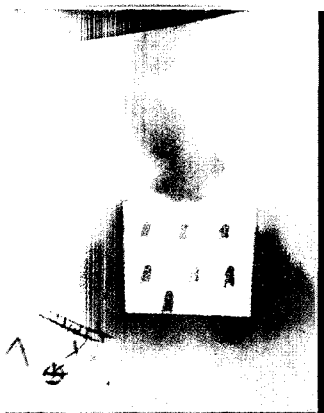

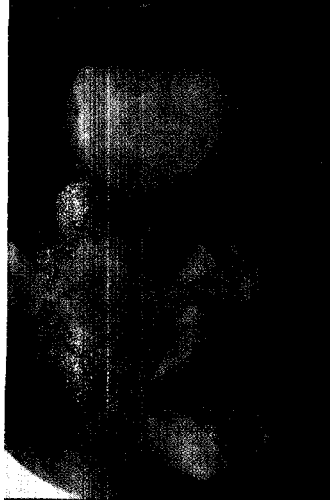

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